

THE PHOENIX' NEST

A Study in Religious Transformations

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G.R.L.

Proud World, said I, cease your contest
And let the mighty babe alone;
The phoenix builds the phoenix' nest,
Love's architecture is His own,
The babe, whose birth embraces this morn,
Made His own bed ere He was born.

R. CRASHAW, *The Shepherds' Hymn*

When he reached the holy sea
And the shore of the luminous ocean, he stayed his steps and
wept.

He gathered his garments together and dressed himself again
In his robes of quetzal feathers and his turquoise mask.
And when he had dressed, he set his own body on fire
And was consumed in flames . . .

And it is well known that when he burned, and his ashes rose
to the sky,

All the fine-feathered birds appeared to watch
How they went up aloft . . .

When the ashes had ceased to burn,
Quetzalcóatl's heart rose up . . .

They say it was raised to heaven
And entered there. The old men say it became
The morning star which appears at dawn . . .

And they say further that it was not seen
For four days after his death, when he had gone to sojourn
In the Kingdom of the Dead.

And in these four days he gathered arrows, and eight days
later

He appeared again as the great star. And it is well known
That since that time he has always been upon his throne.

Annals of Guauhtitlan in the Nahuatl Codice Chimalpopoca, translated into Spanish by Primo F. Velasquez, 1945, and into English by Irene Nicholson and published in Firefly in the Night, 1959

PART I

Time like an Ever-rolling Stream

I

Introductory

LET US MAKE tabernacles,' cried the disciples of Jesus who had witnessed his transfiguration on the mountain. The human soul needs to create its own language in order to define the dimensions in which its experience can be apprehended. Such experience cannot be directly portrayed, because it is only known from within, so that the form appropriate to this knowledge is the myth or symbol from which each man can extract his own vision of truth.

By this means it should be possible for each one who so desires to find for religious experience a universal language of communication as valid for the superconscious as for the subconscious states of being. That can be done only by the very direct telling of a tale with many meanings, which accumulates its intensity in the telling as poetry does. Only by relying on the universal nature of the form, is it possible to describe a wholly subjective experience.

Since, therefore, we each need to make our own portrayal, something must also be said of the nature of artistic expression, and the circumstances which caused the portrayal to assume its particular form. It must be made clear to what extent, if any, the imagination is the apparatus of reality. The personal narrative which follows is a sketch of those events of a single lifetime, which seem worth recording only in so far as they relate themselves to the inner experiences which are the subject of this book.

The story is, I think, required, to give those interior happenings perspective, and therefore a spectator, in the person of any reader

who will keep its purpose in mind. It may thus encourage others, who are conscious of direction in their own lives, to make the knowledge available to some of those who courageously work beside them without the hope of a spiritual rebirth.

Since it has become a matter, through the larger part of the writer's own lifetime, of growing more and more consciously acclimatized to 'unknown modes of being', special emphasis will be given to the methods of communication developed during that period. They are, indeed, described by mystics of every age and race, superconsciousness being intrinsically a shared condition, as subconsciousness is held to be. It only means that one more aspirant bears witness to the sharing. But since we are, it seems from our own history, in the course of becoming individuals, and since freedom of choice is apparently of the essence of these activities at every stage, even when most circumscribed by casual forces, then one more testimony may find its place with the rest. That is to say, the existence of the beings described in all the great world-religions should be reaffirmed from experience, since being a part of life that experience is never identical. If they are taken for the products of fantasy, which is passive and associative, rather than creative imagination, which Coleridge calls the shaping power and prime agent of perception, then it can only be asserted that no effort of the human mind alone could have invented entities so immeasurably beyond its comprehension. The mere affirmation of their existence is perhaps more precious in this age than any restatement of doctrine.

There is, of course, no attempt here to prove that existence, but rather to communicate some conditions in which it is to be found; first in the miniature adumbrations of personal experience, secondly in their counterparts (where even Blake found them) greatly expressed in the mythical and religious literature of the world. It is necessary to show them both in their particular and their general aspects, so that each may illumine the other.

Even in the ages of faith, in the Western world at least, such physical manifestations have never been taken as a matter of course.

In this age of scientific creation an assumption of their imaginative reality must be laid down at the start. As Plato insisted long ago, metaphysical existence cannot be established by argument. It can flash upon the instrument of perception only as a shared communication, in the intensive absorption of minds long purified by the search for truth. So I have never, in over forty years, spoken directly of my own experiences to a single human being. It seems necessary to break that silence now for the following reasons:

1. It has become possible, towards the end of my present life-cycle, to understand them better, in relation to outside events whose effects and causes seem to stretch beyond them.
2. It seems possible, after a return to the study of the world's religious and philosophical systems, to break down their personal isolation. That is:
3. It now seems practicable, with a broader understanding of the symbolism with which they are interpenetrated, to relate them to all men's lives in an intelligible form.
4. They appear to have a bearing on the present epoch of cataclysmal change, in dissolving cultural barriers which do not exist in the higher religious experience. There have been periods, it seems, during the early history of nations, when they have needed to cultivate separation, to the world's great enrichment. At the present moment it appears that humanity's continued existence is actually dependent on the realization that the separate paths to the expression of truth must again converge, while retaining their identity as living things.

It therefore seems necessary to show, in the experience of one individual, an aspect of the direction taken by higher entities in touch with man, for carrying out the purpose of those still higher, in guiding free humanity towards that convergence. A whole order of beings is discernible, many of whom may have undergone men's struggles and uncertainties, and having surmounted these have yet

remained in contact, in the sublime hope of guiding them to knowledge and love as they have themselves been guided.

The apprehension of them is, of course, subjective, but, as we said above, subjectivity itself is to be shared. Far from being shut within the confines of a single mind, superconsciousness is *built* on sharing, as it is hoped to show by examples. That is why love is as essential to this condition as knowledge. The whole method of being enfolded by a higher entity, and oneself enfolding in the heart or head, which marks the differing stages of growth—'a whole lifetime's death in love'—leads to further states of communion with the very highest existence recognizable at a given phase. That highest himself continually appears to die into a higher existence, but is yet empowered to redescend, as Christianity and Northern Buddhism both show (to take two examples only), into the confines of our world. Here enters the tremendous mythology of sacrifice in all realms.

Some examples are also called for, of the enlargement of consciousness beyond ordinary time, as it has affected memory and prevision in daily life. Something must be said, too, of the dimensions and interpenetration of those aspects of space-consciousness which are encountered between the worlds. Of course, these could be more precisely handled by one who is more at home in the great realms of physics and mathematics, but the writer's ignorance should at least prevent any resort to theories. There do appear to be geometric links in this interior experience with space as known to us, as there are planetary links with our measures of time, though admittedly both are subject to other laws than ours. From that point of vision, time and change, those concomitants of human existence which hold us most painfully in thrall, are seen to be beautiful, and the destruction of forms a natural process which releases life for the creation of new forms, to express an indestructible beauty, so that it becomes a matter of more than faith that the spiritual and material worlds exist in unity.

Autobiographical

MY OWN STORY begins with a few vague mind-pictures of the African river on whose banks I was born, and sharper ones of incidents on the voyage to this country, and arrival there with my parents at the age of eighteen months. These are of interest only because they are dated by the sea-journey, and appear not as the fruits of continuous memory, but as pinpoints of consciousness in which I see the child from outside and am at the same time aware of its sensations. In this they resemble the instances of more far-reaching reminiscence described in a later chapter.

Like those, they chiefly appear at the entrance to experience (in this case the arrival in London), so that to recapitulate the events to which they pointed would require an unwinding not justified by the triviality of childish impressions. The momentary double experience, however, was *not* childish, but appeared to belong to some timeless faculty like those which became familiar later on. It exists now, while the events which stretched from it belong to then.¹

My ordinary memory opens in the decorous calm and security of childhood in late-Victorian Kensington, as the eldest of three children in a fairly orthodox, well-to-do Jewish family, extended by a large clan of cousins. I early felt the monotony of this peace, and told them an endless story of adventure and war (which some

¹ Proust notes the same duality of memory, which gave him, he says, a sense of immortality (*Du Côté de chez Swann*, I, and *Le Temps Retrouvé*, II).

of them still remember), in walks through wide streets bordered with plane trees, under the watchful eyes of our nurses. My inveterate day-dreaming aroused suspicions of 'slyness' (I think they meant secrecy) among nurses and housemaids, which caused some of them to invent cruel punishments for trivial carelessness. These were accepted as part of the strangeness of life, and were perhaps a first salutary correction against pride. They also made me stoical. We were not brought up under the illusion that man is free.

The pleasant streets and squares, again, bordered on a squalid region of want and crime of which I was intensely aware.¹ Before books and my mother's piano sonatas had opened their limitless pathways to my imagination, there was somewhere an abyss for which I had not yet found the corresponding paradise. This darkness belonged only to childhood.

No 'shadowy recollections' of transcendent experience broke the formal regularity of those first days, although they did not content me. Only a few imaginative moments burst into my dream-life with piercing bliss. I have a memory of a sea-cliff caught on some holiday at sunset, which still appears to be made of rose-quartz and amethyst, and to emit soundless music. Such revelations were extremely rare, and after I had begun, when nearly four years old, to share a governess with a neighbouring family, the mind emerged to offer its distractions. Our teacher was a travelled widow, who encouraged the composition of poetry and historical illustration, together with visits to the museums beyond Kensington Gardens. In a very early geography lesson the word or thought 'Greece' brought to my mind's eye a procession of women descending a hillside with water-jars on their heads, which remained a live but static memory. Rather later perhaps, I read in a magazine called *Little Folks* the story of Siddhartha and a poem about his rejection of Nirvana, which filled me with deepest emotion, and was remembered throughout my life. We children knew nothing of the story of Christ. We acquired a Hebrew

¹ Recently notorious as Notting Dale.

teacher when I was six, and listened peacefully on Friday evenings, after the ceremony of the bread and wine, to my mother's readings of Old Testament stories and the Psalms.

On Sundays we visited the studios of famous painters then thrown open to the public, or drove to Richmond or Hampton Court to see the spring blossom, or explored the meadows beside the Thames. We were early accustomed to long walks, a habit which was valuable to me at a later time.

The school to which I was transferred when nearly ten, also encouraged pictorial composition, but an epidemic soon after my arrival there, of some children's illness to which I was immune, allowed me a few months of separate tuition which was important to my development. In the school's annexe on Campden Hill I read Kingsley's *Heroes* and a grown-up book on the excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum, which opened to me the Mediterranean past. My father took me there each day, in the earliest of our years of walks together, enchanting me with tales of his early adventures in Africa and the southern states of America, both being dear and familiar ground from my story books and perhaps the starting place of my own later wanderings.

This awakening to the more active life around me was temporarily arrested by my transference to the High School which I was soon deeply to love.

But first came the bewildering adjustment to long hours in its crowded classes, from whose confusion only two incidents emerge: the exquisite peal of a child's voice declaiming the lyrics from Milton's *Comus* which I still remember,¹ and my entry into a new classroom to hear these words: 'The Phocians were guarding the mountain road, but the air was still, and the leaves which the Persians stirred with their feet gave warning . . .' Evidently the preparations for the battle of Thermopylae as described by Herodotus, and the immediate opening of a new world to me. Not

¹ The child was the daughter of the great chemist Sir William Ramsay, who was our neighbour. I believe that many children would respond to great poetry if they heard it sufficiently early.

many people are likely to remember their schooldays with so much joy and gratitude.

But these were mere preliminaries. I was eleven or twelve when my father, calling me into his dressing-room before one of his many journeys abroad, made me a surprise present of Dean Church's prose translations from Homer, illustrated by Flaxman's designs. This was a major event, and so the scene remains alive in my memory. I soon found other translations, and from now onwards my mind was filled with Greek epic and drama, with the Aeneid and the English and French heroic and lyric poetry which they had inspired. The long hours of holidays indoors were passed in illustrating them. Through them I saw grandeur in human failure, and divinity in mortal lives.

By the following year I had begun to teach myself Greek, anticipating mental exploration in company with the succession of schoolmistresses who squandered for my sake their exiguous hours of leisure. My bond with these noble women was much closer than with my classmates, and I think now that it influenced the nature of later ties. But friendship, which was to become so important an element of existence, was still unknown to me.

I had already begun to tell myself, or rather to watch the movement of, an endless tale of adventures in Troy during the siege. Its central figures were Hector and his imagined adviser; a priest of Apollo called Hieron (I had at first no notion that this name meant 'the holy one'). The tale acted as an opiate over a long period, but the relation between hero and teacher often took on a reality which reacted on the spectator, and the battles somehow became my own. I think that this practice, too, must have had some connection with experiences to be described later—in a prevision of my first other-world instructor before I knew him.

Under these impacts the religion, if such it may be called, of my approaching adolescence, was expanded into an aesthetic humanism, passionately based on beauty in nature and art. There

are otherwise no memories of divine intimations during that self-centred period, and with the extension of my reading (against rules) to such books as Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*, the prevailing late Victorian scepticism overcame me, after some agonizing interior battles. Although external conformity persisted with my partly orthodox environment, this rift was noted with deep concern by my parents, but though their faith and goodness had its influence, I recognized very early the necessity to distinguish my own way of life.

There was undoubtedly present in me at the time much intellectual arrogance, and a too easily accepted leadership among the growing children of my own and closely related families. I had no idea, then, that the imaginative powers derived from my enthusiastic reading were balanced by a lack of insight into human character.¹

By the time I reached seventeen, Plato had become my master, with his Ladder of Beauty reaching beyond sense to the not quite abstract world of imagination, which gave me a firmer mental orientation and a deep desire, strengthened by the study of Greek sculpture, for achievement in art. Returning from weekly readings of Jowett to a blind neighbour, I had the exact sensation of walking on air.

The last year of my school life was, however, clouded by a really bitter struggle. Our mother, whose own mother had died in her thirties with her twelfth child, had been brought up by elder sisters. She continued in married life to rely on the practical wisdom of older relatives who knew more of the outside world than she did, and now on their advice opposed any prolongation of my career in scholarship.

I, who had lived so long on theories, was insufficiently armed for such a contest, although at that period a considerable fighter,

¹ I was the eldest by a few years. At a later time they showed their superiority in coming to terms with life. One became an international lawyer, one a Privy Councillor, one the Chief Justice of a large province; all happy in their wives and children. My brother's great character I did respect from the beginning, but had little understanding of my sister's conquest of frustrations till we were much older.

and strongly backed by my headmistress. We fell back on a compromise, held to be inadequate on both sides.

At that time and in that circle marriage was considered my only suitable destiny, but the artist was held in a romantic esteem hardly credible at the present time, when his achievements are so much more widely understood. My mother's talents in this direction had been neglected in youth, and she had found the chance to cultivate them only after her marriage, between continual social engagements. My father deferred to her judgment in family matters, and her sisters and cousins approved of a similar future for me, so long as it had no professional contamination!

A year as an external student at Bedford College, in order to obtain a degree, was the only concession allowed me, but there the visiting Professor of Greek was A. B. Cook of Cambridge, and so, in the epoch of discovery of the prehellenic civilizations, I had my first brief intoxication with archaeology.

The distaste for making my *début* into a social world of balls and other gatherings, which was prolonged for me when I had to act as companion to my sister, was no doubt chiefly due to my secret fear of marriage. This should be emphasized here, because it had to do, I think, with my future subjective education. Certainly I had the sense of holding back for the sake of an unknown fulfilment, which I placed even then in a Greek world of ideal beauty beyond the reach of death. In childhood and youth I was always looking for something at least relatively permanent behind change. It took long for me to realize that permanence does not exist in the physical world.

But there was also the more personal and most unspiritual factor of pride, which was to lend itself to feminism, in an age when women were fighting for social and political independence.

By now, however, I was already reconciled to the choice of an artist's career, as the result of a visual experience beside a mountain lake in Cumberland, during the summer after I left school, of a band of Greek mythical heroes in their dark ship, approaching the Happy Isles. What I did not understand then and for many years

afterwards, was that vision cannot be directly expressed in art. I was too much dazzled by its new objectivity to be sufficiently concerned with the means of expression which is the true function of painting. Bewildered by my unfamiliar environment among art students, and the loss of cleansing intellectual discussion, I soon began to suffer from almost continuous nervous headaches. On tearing my mind's roots out of their academic soil, for conscious effort towards the artistic expression which had come naturally to me in my earlier years, I had now to stand the test of technical education, and saw myself failing in a mission to transmit imagined beauty.

In the midst of these opposing tensions, the cataclysm of my father's sudden death forced me out of absorption in my own search and purpose, to a greater sharing in the lives of those around me, while it removed for ever the dreaded pressure of social obligations.

It was during this period of conclusive loss and partial submersion in the family circle, that I received at the age of twenty-two my first direct intimation (apart from aesthetic visualization) of other-world existence.

Entering a small room into which I had moved to be near my mother and sister, I one day found it dominated by a white light of intense brilliance, alive and concentrated to a vaguely spherical form. It appeared once only, but left a sense of positive energy at hand as a support through the years that immediately followed.

I had meanwhile obtained a three-year studentship in painting at the Royal Academy schools, where my growing uncertainties of method and technique were further confused by the traditional monthly changing of instructors. Each of the Academicians was concerned in turn to impart his own style, and I, who had till recently continued to work from imagination and memory, had not acquired sufficient humility to study under them the human form as it appeared to the eye, without reference to ideal proportions. I was still quite unaware of the great new movements abroad, which were breaking the traditional forms of European art from which

the life had long been ebbing. My headaches were almost continuous, entailing constant absences from work of which I was bitterly ashamed.

No doubt this failure opened my heart and mind to the sudden revelation of the Hindu epics and the Vedanta, now introduced to me by the Theosophical Society through a school friend of my brother's, and most of all to the scriptures of Northern Buddhism. The loving recognition of these last, in English libraries and museums, and later among the temples of the Far East, brought about a certain religious awakening.

It appears that belief and knowledge remain sufficiently fluid to change with aspects of the personality on which they impose their changes. Only so can access be safeguarded to the one source of understanding. The shapes and symbols of Buddhist art, together with Taoist landscape, as depicted on wall-paintings, hanging scrolls and banners in London museums, became my earliest formal objects of religious devotion, but in this process the heroic figures of Greek idealism, which had occupied till now almost the whole aesthetic sphere of my imagination, were swept away, never to resume control. As a consequence my art lost its solidity, which it never afterwards regained, so that I abandoned the remainder of my Royal Academy studentship. This point seems of value to the present investigation, since the environment in which the mind's conceptions are at home is apparently used by its teachers (perhaps even resumed by them) in the building of transcendent consciousness.

There had come to me, while I was working at the Royal Academy, a dream which prophetically symbolized an approaching turning-point in my history. Although a tragic dream, it left me for two days in a state of great happiness. I did not know why.

There came first to the ears of myself and 'the children' (as I thought of them) isolated in a mountain hut, the expected mantric sound of what would in later days be recognized as a warning siren, or alert. With mounting joy I waited at the door to let in the one

who was to come. But once he was among us I saw that he had let fall a whip, and knew that I had brought among the children the Adversary. He began distributing gifts in the shape of drawing materials to all excepting myself, till at last there was left only a parcel which I knew to contain an 'infernal machine'. I also knew that since I had let him in he could not leave me. So when he laid the parcel on the stove at the farther end of the hut, I went and stood beside it. We waited, facing each other across the stove. When the explosion came, I awoke.

By this time there was indeed an Art Group of chosen friends who met each week at a studio off Regent Street which I shared with an outstanding fellow-student, and stimulated my imagination and intellect without breaking through my personal frustration. By this time also, I had formed a number of friendships among Moslem and Hindu students and Japanese diplomatic families stationed in London, and had joined various movements for social reform. Perhaps I should have become content with these palliatives, among the first of which must be reckoned the close companionship of my brother, then studying to be an architect, and already notable for intrepid and single-minded goodness, and my happy and knowledgeable guide over unfrequented Welsh mountains, or the downs and woodlands of southern England, for ever loved by us both.

My sister was leaving for Paris to be trained as a singer, but our mother, still in her first years of loneliness, and not unnaturally attributing my lack of achievement to moral inertia, now sent me, with great courage and in spite of very much straitened finances, to find at the age of twenty-four a new stimulus in Japan, under the care of a highly placed family whom we had known in London. I soon left behind me their half-Anglicized hospitality, for a year's wandering among wooded mountains and resounding beaches, in close kinship with their beauty-loving inhabitants, many of whom had never before met a person from the West.

Nevertheless, the ascent of holy peaks with troops of pilgrims, or solitary explorations above the reflections of mountain lakes to

the chime of waterfalls; months passed in temples, or days watching Noh dances and heroic drama in the friendly capitals—all these only confirmed for me the unconstructive aspect of my search, and served on my return to separate me still farther from my home environment.

Once in Kyoto, while gazing at a painting of the Buddha's Parinirvana, brought out for a single day each year at the temple in which I was a guest, I experienced a sensation of falling which was only subjective. Next day I was shooting the rapids of the Hozu River between fiery walls of maple forest, only to find their grandeur shot with darkness. After that it was a long time before I could look at a painting again.

The Far Eastern wanderings, then, quite failed to bring a physical and spiritual renewal. I returned dispirited and bewildered to my home and the group of friends whose efforts were beginning to bear some fruit in poetry, painting and the drama, and in whose growing success I attempted to submerge my sense of failure. Beauty itself was now no longer a source of pure and timeless joy, but a tormenting reminder of something never to be attained.

It was at this stage that I met and introduced among them (as in the dream of the mountain hut) a young Hindu law student of peculiar vital energy, who was working with another body of my friends gathered into the Stepney clinic of Harry Roberts, the 'Sixpenny Doctor', to build better conditions in the East End of London. Kamala's occult knowledge soon brought a greatly enlarged insight to bear on my besetting problem of vocation, which was more and more assuming a religious tone. For it was about this date, in my middle twenties, that other-world experiences, some of which will be described in the next chapters, suddenly began to enter my astonished consciousness. No doubt the theoretical and practical studies of the past few years, within and without the Theosophical Society, had opened a way to these, without, I think, awakening any expectation of results that I should have considered quite outside my range. The long frustration of unforgotten ambition probably had its part also in my change of

direction. To these must be added the stirring presence among us of our Indian friend, and it was in connection with him that the first of these experiences occurred.

I was seated in a small wood on the outskirts of London, absorbed in grief and something like prayer, on behalf of Kamala, upon whose wrist I had noticed on the previous day the numerous punctures of an incipient drug habit. A figure was suddenly standing before me, somewhat larger than life, in an ungirded long-sleeved garment falling straight to his feet, and wearing a pale cloth head-dress. His long eyes, above wide cheekbones over which the skin was rather tightly stretched, sparkled with intelligence and tender humour.

I may not have noticed all these details on that first occasion, nor do I remember if any words passed between us, in that soundless language which was soon to become familiar. I felt neither fear nor, at the moment, surprise, but only peace within the enfolding benediction of his presence, together with a sudden striking of icy cold across my forehead. What I saw and felt was of the nature of recognition, and did not fade like ordinary memories.

When I rose to leave the place, I found my Aberdeen terrier trembling so violently that he could hardly keep his feet, but he had not run away.

If this scene opened one phase of a new life, another type of experience began about the same time with equal suddenness. A party of us used to meet at regular intervals for meditation on behalf of the sick. On a certain occasion, supported no doubt by the force generated by the group in unison, I found myself functioning 'elsewhere' in the presence of the Teacher described above, and others with him, gathered within the circumference of my skull.

These two contrasting methods of communication have remained constant, except for one interval, during the remainder of my life. I can only think, looking back on this beginning, that they may have been the first conscious intimations of an older training and relationship, now entered into, like all my endeavours, before the gradual acquirement of a systematic technique.

Although it does not come under either of these categories, one complex incident should perhaps be recalled, both for its part in the enlargement of my consciousness at the time, and its likeness to parallel modes of growth elsewhere. It happened as follows:

Sitting by my fire one morning, I had the sudden sensation of attack by a splendid leopard, savage with hunger. I could hear his snarls, and smell his wildness. Sunlight shone on his golden skin, lighting even the small hairs of his face. He came daily for a while, and was beginning to crunch the bones at the nape of my neck before I found sufficient detachment to call upon my Teacher. The beast vanished immediately, and never reappeared; in that form at least. In his place I was aware, during the days that followed, of the starved visage of a monk in a brown habit, hollow-eyed and shining with sweat, his untensured hair falling limply on to his shoulders. His profile was my own. At sight of him I knew that the leopard had been myself, and hard on that recognition the monk too vanished. During the years that followed, his back with its lank descending hair was sometimes visible as a kind of warning signal, but the whole episode slowly faded from my memory.

Some thirty years later I was astonished to read Alexandra David-Neel's account of an ordeal undergone by some Tibetan neophytes of her acquaintance, as part of their training for a monastic life. They believed themselves to be devoured by a demonic leopard or tiger, sometimes with terrible consequences before their saving identification of the beast with themselves.¹

The youths' experience, in conformity with Buddhist conceptions of the unity of all life, was regarded as a symbolic reparation for the evils inflicted by man on the animal world. I had attributed no such meaning to my own adventure, though I must have been already familiar with the scriptural record of the Buddha's earlier birth; a favourite subject in Chinese frescoes and Tibetan hanging banners, in which, as the young prince Mahasattva, he gave his body to a starving tigress. Otherwise this

¹ For instance in *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* (Penguin, 1938), pp. 133 ff.

strange parallel remains with ritual practices of Tibet, the study of which in much later years has become increasingly close and dear.

Together with all these, I began at this period to experience a whole series of 'recollections', to be illustrated in a later chapter. They were equally surprising and unsought, and must be referred to at this point because, whatever their true significance, they appeared as part of a drama of shared relationships reaching into the past, and with some potential bearing on the future, of nearly all this group of friends, and this gave their lives a new orientation in my thoughts. It looked as if work of value to our generation might result from this enlarged outlook, of great significance because it was at last directed and shared. After the negative achievement of recent years this marvellous hope, upon which all my endeavours were now concentrated, seemed capable of overcoming every disability, and to justify my many painful withdrawals from family duties. It is surprising now to realize how vague were its terms of reference.

It so far took form in our minds as a religious movement which was to come to birth in India under Kamala's leadership. It was to have been the forerunner of a new age of spiritual revival, but within a little more than two years a succession of events within our group, which had now reached Italy, had brought irrevocable disillusion in which the very enlightenment which I had rejoiced to share had become an instrument of catastrophe for those members of our company whom I most deeply loved.

Their leader, who might, we had believed, have become a world teacher, appeared in the accumulation of events in the role of traitor and part-charlatan, who had nevertheless informed loyalty and truth for us with deeper values. Both then and later I recognized Kamala's use of cruelty as belonging to a method employed by some eastern teachers, in breaking down the barriers to their pupils' progress, and no doubt my own complete humiliation was a necessary remedy against the crippling sin of spiritual pride. For the lifelong value of his teaching gratitude

survives, and because I did not feel hatred even for the breaking of other lives, I could never hate anyone again.

The experience, which was a cleavage of my whole life, probably represented failure of a test, for its meaning has remained incomplete to this day.

Some of my sorrow was for the parents of those concerned. My own mother, against whose staunch family pride I had fought for years with grief, staking all on my beliefs, now came to the rescue in the selfless courage of love. Making no parade either of her wounds or her victory, she brought me home from Italy.

During the periods of severest physical prostration, one of which reached the boundaries of death, those who had first called me 'in and out of time' did not desert me. I, who had no pity for myself, felt with surprise the penetration of their compassion. Nor at the nadir did they fail to send their message. In the moment of revealed disaster, when all the facts were accepted and all life appeared as a negation, in that very moment a spark or seed of reality became visible, an infinitesimal summons to the unknown. This was perhaps the most important event for me in the whole tragedy.

The body of friends (three of whom had mental breakdowns) was violently torn apart, and the First World War closed down on our separation, leaving me in ignorance of the fate of the nearest of all, who was married to our former leader. I saw myself as Demeter, mourning a Persephone who had become 'the bride of Darkness'.

The slowly realized cataclysm of the war drew me at length from preoccupation with my own catastrophe. In partly regained health the new occupations, first of a V.A.D. nurse in a hospital for convalescents, and later of junior Administrative Assistant at the War Office, were of quite a superficial nature, for the terror of self-deception shut me from inner experience, and I shrank from new friendships in fear that my influence might again prove destructive. It is possible that my self-centred remorse attributed responsibility too exclusively to my own actions. Only the per-

sistent courage of one fellow-worker in the hospital, a painter turned nurse, who followed me to the War Office, and whose searching affection refused to be rejected, roused me before the war's end to tentative fresh growth, as a new person out of spiritual, intellectual and imaginative impoverishment.

England, which the shared sufferings of the war had turned from a scene of exile into a home, now shrank to the dimensions of a fifteenth-century holiday cottage in the simplicity of the Sussex downs. This brought with it, to an extent never felt before, even in my brother's company, the happy proximity of ordinary lives and the small things of nature. It brought again the redeeming power of friendship as communicated by a group of wartime companions. Except in our long walks and readings of contemporary poetry and prose, by firelight or in the orchard overhanging the Wild Brooks (from which, between the fall of apples or the cries of snipe and bittern we could sometimes hear the guns in France), I was always a little withdrawn. This was not only from the lingering fear of conveying harm, but also because the art of painting, which was its working bond, had lost its original power in me.

It was, of course, a more than personal break with the past. Like myself in early youth, the whole world of creative art was battling with an influx of spirit, which destroys established form in order to impart new life. This had long ago happened in France, but I had been unaware of it until the exhibitions held in London during the war. At its close my wartime friends were reinforced by others, home from France, who, meeting at our studio in Lincoln's Inn, opened an aesthetic world of many arts, which became for me very nearly the centre of life that it was to them.

But in the year of the Peace Treaty 'Persephone' returned from India with her child, and soon began to carve out a new career in a provincial town, and with the relaxing of that tension the intuitive penetration of my spiritual solitude by a second member of our new group encouraged me to meet at last the inner communion which I had held away for five years. The faithlessness of its rejection had marked my lowest point of fall, though the cock did not crow for

me till long afterwards. Now, with no words of blame, I was simply received back into 'my Father's house'.

When communication was resumed, a second figure had joined the first; of Western appearance radiating white and gold. He had been visible long ago, but only as an outline or shining silhouette. Some of the functions of guidance were now transferred to him, and henceforth both he and my first teacher appeared together in any emergency, and the two always stood on either side, at the gates of the other world.

That autumn, alone on the downs, there came to me again the certain message of preparation for a future Coming. After that I was never cut off from hope.

Now I saw the gigantic sufferings of the war as borne by a God. Now in astonishment I found the ceremonies of the Mass (whether Roman or Orthodox) and at the Cenotaph, to hold a veritable communion from which I was never excluded. The return to dependence on personal religious experience brought me all the closer to established ritual, once I had found the experience to be inherent in the ritual. To share conviction with a crowd was a help as the leaning on music had been.¹

Now the surpassing poetry of Judaeo-Christian symbolism took a sudden and lasting reality. Byzantium and the European Middle Ages, to which I had always felt a stranger, became new territories for exploration in company with my friends. The movement was all towards the West.

There was a little artistic recovery. External nature, though adored, had never in itself been a valid subject for my art, which had at last to be abandoned, after frantic efforts to recapture the heroic images. From now onwards my study of formal creation was theoretical.

Looking backwards, it seems that this cleavage was necessary, in order to draw the creative imagination away from the deeply serious preoccupation with aesthetic form, with which I was now

¹ I discovered later that this could occur equally at a distance, when listening to wireless ceremonies.

surrounded, to the development of the inner vision. Then it appeared for the second time to be merely the sign of failure. This realization drove me back to the almost-forgotten scholar's activities of my youth, and with them the coaching of several young friends for the Oxford degrees newly granted to women. In teaching them I recovered my former knowledge, so that a year's broken reading at home earned me a M.A. degree at London University in Classical Archaeology and Philosophy. After that a temporary post in the British Museum, under Sir Aurel Stein, resuscitated for a very short while my bond with Central Asia and the Far East. In arranging for illustration the lively tomb-furniture which he had brought from outposts of Chinese culture at its peak, I had glimpses also of manuscripts and painted banners rescued from a halting-place of Buddhist pilgrims whose footsteps the archaeologist had followed from love. I knew then that respect for an explorer's comprehensive quality which I was soon to recognize in the field. For a few tantalizing months I was caught back into the enthusiasm of my student days, but the time was by no means ripe for my return.

Long ago, during the Italian sojourn before the war, a symbol, at that time inexplicable, had frequently imposed itself before my eyes. This appeared as a domed building flanked by two towers or minarets—the then unrecognized, and soon forgotten, entrance to Islamic territory. The Semitic Near East (as it was still called) had so far been quite alien from my imagination. It was now to take a central place there, a medium of reconciliation between its East and West.

The publication, soon after I had left the British Museum, of the architect's plans for the new Hebrew University overlooking Jerusalem, brought back the symbol insistently to my mind. I was suddenly filled with longing to bring the love of Hellenic civilization to temper the aggressive ardour of the young immigrants then arriving in Palestine under the promise of the Balfour Declaration. The plans of the University building were never carried out in that form, and the faculty to which I was recommended by its English Committee was found on my arrival to be not even in

existence. But after I had put in order the library of the Palestine Exploration Fund, the mandatory Government's Department of Antiquities opened to me a two years' period of work at the Museum in Jerusalem, which had been left unorganized since the Turkish occupation. This was an invaluable introduction to the archaeology, not only of the Holy Land, but of the nations with which she had been in contact throughout her history, and as usual in my meandering career it required to be studied right from its beginnings, out of the physical material at hand. The compilation and illustrating of catalogues for publication laid the foundation of unguessed-at future adventure. But still more important was life outside the Department. To a mind absorbed in the then fruitful clash of nationalities and stormy aspirations of Jerusalem under the mandate, the world of everyday took on a richness never experienced before or afterwards. Lifelong ancestral stresses no longer opposed my personal efforts, and the exhilaration of the physical climate relieved for a time those perpetual headaches, and called up a renewal of energy, like a second youth, during many blissful journeys through a unique landscape alive with the past, which reached back to the palaeolithic world.

The experience rarely attained the deepest level. For all the penetrating discussions in surroundings so culturally satisfying, I was spiritually, on its margin to the end, and refused to be drawn closer, even in the pressures of friendship, to its heroic but aggressive nationalism. What eventually emerged as pivotal after the work was once again suddenly cut short, was something that embraced its opposite; the nomadic heart of the desert.

At its source it spoke to me with the voice of T. E. Lawrence, whose life-history within its wider milieu explained to me much of my own, so that one kind of isolation was never to return, even after his death—in fact less than ever then.

It was by means of this transforming experience that the multitudinous vitality of the Holy Land served both as a foil and an introduction to my succeeding adventures in the deserts of Iraq, where labour and friendship became at last indissolubly united.

In my earlier phases of abortive work before and after the First World War, there had been some development, as I have shown, of group-knowledge and feeling. During the six winters spent in the desert headquarters of an American-sponsored, but international, archaeological expedition to the site of the vanished Mesopotamian city of Eshnunna, I witnessed the steady expansion of intellects, under the benign influence of its Field Director Henri Frankfort, to the encouragement of individual research. Nearly every member of our company has produced original work since then, and several have attained eminence. As to my own life's pattern, in which each phase of work suddenly began and abruptly ended, a new task had always to be learnt painfully from the beginning, so that none of them obtained the solidity of a profession. So in this transition to field work I found myself isolated with impaired health among much younger experts of various nationalities, together with their gifted wives; their mental attainments balanced by lively, sometimes tense, emotions. Thus I was once again forced to realize that the practical work to which I was committed, of recording and pictorially reconstructing the cultural products of our city through its Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian epochs, was only a cover for the experience which still pointed beyond it.

In the spring of each year we moved out of the encroaching heat and dust to Sargon's city of Khorsabad in the territory of Assyria, and the monotony of our barren landscape broke kaleidoscopically into the many colours of the freshly blooming northern hills, peopled with Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldaeans and Yezidis. Every new encounter awakened delight, and is remembered with joy, but the Middle East still took its deepest meaning from the past, inspired by our Field Director's vivid mind; and was forming in my own consciousness a centre for intellectual exploration. And that past was focussed in our winter labours, where the other world was constantly with me in the deep meditations of the nights, or in solitary walks at sunset amid wheeling 'shadows of the indignant desert birds'.

Both then, and through the summers spent at home between my family and always-experimenting painter friends, the presence of these other-world relationships was deepening towards a climax in which I was given to understand that there must be some recapitulation of certain aspects of my unfinished Italian experience of twenty years earlier. This inaugurated a second interval of shattering bereavement, enforced withdrawal, and a serious cerebro-spinal illness. It appeared that the hidden pattern of experience, which was not to be found in any single phase of work and friendship, but drew something from each in turn, laid it down that each scene of action must be left behind when its meaning had been extracted.

During this interval, which was a touchstone of reality, and of great emotional beauty, the position of all friendships became settled into a more regular nightly recapitulation of communion in which living and dead were joined. This served as a basis for flight to the condition beyond either, in a shaping and sharing of effort to which the service of former years represented a mere apprenticeship.

Recurring phases of the illness in later years seem to have been connected with adjustments between vehicles of consciousness¹—but cause and effect appear generally inextricable. During transcendent experience no excitement is felt, nor is there normally any sudden reaction on returning to outward life, such as that described by Emily Brontë.² But fatigue may supervene sooner or later, bringing severe spinal tension, as it does after any concentrated work.

Restored at length to active life by the expert hands of a chiropractor,³ I made a journey with a university grant through the still living prehistoric lands of Western Europe, which was intended

¹ I was later aware that the cervical source of disorder was the part attacked by the leopard in the vision recorded on p. 26.

² In *The Prisoner*. 'Oh dreadful is the check', etc.

³ My sister, with selfless desire to help me, consulted a spirit medium. I was constitutionally opposed to this method of enquiry, but must acknowledge with deep gratitude that the information obtained effected my cure after the doctors had failed to do so. The damage was located among particular cervical vertebrae, and the proposed manipulator named.

to supplement the former yearly passage through the historic centres of the Near and Middle East. For now I saw my way, with considerable surprise, and after half a lifetime of frustration in the arts, towards creative work in the writing of a book on the community of religious origins among early peoples. This drew on all my previous regions of exploration (except the very important Buddhist ones), under the enlightened stimulus of my recent Field Director and his wife, who had become my close friends; twin lamps of intellect now restored to me, during summer visits to a region of southern England already sacred as a meeting-ground between two worlds.

The book, I think, had no directly religious purpose, its material being chiefly archaeological, but I was to find, with a shock of gratitude, that its influence on a number of readers was mainly religious. I think it likely that all creative work, small or great, is the result of collaboration with a higher consciousness, and that this is what they sensed behind the imperfect and transitory mechanism of research.

The book was finished in the first year of the new world-war, and the day after its last references were given their context, I found a post as joint librarian of the Hellenic and Roman societies in London which brought me into that sphere of Greek learning so much longed-for in my youth. This involved the threefold happiness of sitting on committees with worshipped scholars now grown old, of offering to foreign exiles the hospitality of a richly equipped library, and encouraging enthusiastic undergraduates in research. As usual, the administrative aspect of my duties had to be learnt from the beginning, and was never well learnt. Even here, where I felt so much at home, the real experience seems to have been transferred elsewhere.

In this cherished environment I remained throughout the great upheavals of the war and the peace, during which I learned to accept the shattering of forms, and to recognize the truth that essential Beauty cannot be destroyed. I followed it with a last visit to Anatolia, to obtain material for a sequel to my book, which was

to be concerned with the heroic phase of culture represented in the Epic—a phase strongly present in my imagination since childhood.

There, between the rocks of a grassy hillside, carved with scenes of ancient ritual, and separated by a wildly booming river from the ruined Hittite capital, I found one of those abiding centres which survive all change, as passageways for the journeying soul. It is still continually present in my mind's eye, and was a starting-point for the book and the B.B.C. lecture that followed it.

Like the earlier ones, this last of my voyages had been symbolically predicted to me. It was succeeded by a new period of heavy personal loss, a serious return of my illness, and also of expanding other-world development. In my enforced withdrawal from libraries and museums, from the reveries during solitary walks upon which I was formerly dependent, and the stimulus of intellectual argument, I now occupied myself with a book suggested by an Athenian 'reminiscence'¹ which had occasionally haunted me since its involvement in the group-tragedy of my twenties. It was followed almost immediately by an attempted reconstruction of one phase of Plato's human history, which plunged me into welcome philosophic research.

These were to be the last resuscitations, and the past no longer holds me in thrall. The ensuing comparison of the religious philosophies of Europe and Asia, the subject of the third part of the present book, has at length brought a reconciliation, never before wholly understood, of the long oscillation between the Greek and Far Eastern sides of my intellect, with Tibet at its centre firmly established above disaster like ruined Constantinople at the Renaissance. Beyond it, amid some continuation of illness and consequent seclusion from normal activities, my direct super-conscious experience has been incomparably widened and deepened, and become so much clarified that some expression of it, however pitifully inadequate, must, it seems, be attempted at last. For the compelling desire to share the knowledge of joy has kept pace

¹ See below, pp. 68, 69.

throughout with its experience, and is now my only incentive to action.

*Looking backward over this curious history of floundering struggles to learn and work, I see its coherence only as a compound of many lives, amalgamated for a fleeting instant by physical inheritance, by intellectual exploration, by the deeply loved companionship of nature and humanity, by a recognition of causality, and some degree of abiding spiritual absorption. Its function cannot, I feel, be determined apart from its Directors: the divine and human transmitters of light to this shuddering world; for the only integral being to emerge into the future, out of my contributory personalities, appears to be their child.

PART II

The Backward-flying Harmony

Unknown Modes of Being

HOW DOES GOD,' asks Eckhart, 'work without an image in the depth and essence of the soul? That I cannot know, for the soul has only power to conceive in images.' In a previous chapter it was shown how, having lost the direct power of expression in form, it became necessary for me to make the long journey towards the invisible source of form, in order to bring back life to the devitalized bodies of aesthetic imagination, before any new physical expression could become possible. 'Such things cannot be thought out. They must grow again from the forgotten depths.'¹

However illusory all images of worship may be from a metaphysical standpoint, I learnt that so long as the imagination is kept fluid, they may be safely served with devotion as keys to what is higher; as stations on the ascent of beauty. One was not lost in the products of imagination, because always reaching beyond them. This book is about the breaking down of the distinction, or opposition, between the expression of imagery in art, and its creation in religious experience as an act of worship. These appear as two phases of a single activity.

The existences behind the images break them to appear always in a vaster dimension, as centres of life within an enlarging sphere of action. 'Perfection is not an absolute value, but a harmony of forces produced at any moment when movement is co-ordinated by direction towards a common goal.'²

¹ R. Wilhelm and C. J. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (1935), p. 105.

² Lama Anagarika Govinda, 'The Relativity of Perfection', *The Middle Way* (May 1960).

This conception appears valid, according to the wonderful description of the Kabbalists right up to the primary outflowings of supreme creation.

'Mirrors of the truth of the Divine Being, ideal creatures of His Wisdom, representations of His Will, vessels of His Power, instruments of His Activity, treasure-chambers of His Bliss . . . also emanations, garments, faces, forms, sanctuaries, revelations, in steps that lead down from Him and up to Him again; fields, limits, lights, fire, qualities or splendour, spiritual forms of appearance, measures, values and weights, touchstones and categories'.¹

Among the first laws directly discernible in the invisible kingdoms is, as we saw, the universality of sharing, according to capacity, the indivisible love-wisdom which is the breath of life in those regions. Therefore it seems permissible to describe without desecration even the lowest spheres of activity in terms of the immeasurably higher, such as the above description of the Sephiroth. Only in this way can a language be found, for what, if it is to have any value, must be based on personal experience, which is 'deeper than the strongest intellectual conviction, because the act of spiritual vision transforms'.²

In the first part of this book, two early events were recorded, which belong to a return journey towards the Source of beauty. They were told in order to illustrate the two main kinds of contact established between the narrator and certain inspirers who could at that time be described as teachers with the power of transcending physical barriers. In these 'the transformations of the visible into the invisible which we are all performing appear to be more complete,³ and since in this spiritual mechanism 'it is necessary that every thing should impart itself into something else, or the Good would not be good—nor the Soul be soul',⁴ such contacts are

¹ Rabbi A. K. Jirja's definition of the Sephiroth, quoted by H. Liebstockl, *Die Geheimwissenschaften in Lichte unserer Zeit* (Amalthea Verlag, 1932), p. 200, and referred by N. Wydenbrück (Rilke, 1949), to Rilke's *Second Duino Elegy*.

² R. M. Rilke, *Briefe aus Muzot* 337, to his Polish translator.

³ Plotinus, *Against the Gnostics*, En. II, IX. 3.

⁴ Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, tr. H. V. Guenther Rider, (London 1959), ch. 3.

humanly explicable. But it is noteworthy that while the images of transformation may dissolve into higher forms, the Teachers remain themselves. The Eastern insistence on the purely symbolic nature of the images never extends to the gurus in whom the divine nature is felt to be incarnate, and through whom its field of force is inherited by their disciples. For that reason Milarepa begins nearly all his poems with an invocation to his Teacher and spiritual father Marpa, using the language of worship.

The Instructors appear to correspond also with certain of those to whom Gampopa, the eleventh-century founder of the Kargyutpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and chief disciple and spiritual heir of Milarepa, calls spiritual friends: 'Be insatiable to gaze at spiritual friends, because it is difficult to behold them, hard for them to appear and not easy to meet them.' He classifies them as follows: (1) a human being, (2) a Bodhisattva on a high level (i.e. one who has earned but renounced liberation in order to help mankind), (3) the spiritual body of the Buddha as humanly realized, (4) the Body of Bliss.

Only the first two, he claims, are discernible to those on the preparatory path to enlightenment.¹

In the one instance, as described earlier, a being was perceived, apparently objectively, standing on actual earth against a background of known trees, and conveying a wordless message, the first intimation of a life-long relationship. In the second example the writer, meditating with a group of companions, suddenly found herself functioning in a subtle body, in the presence of this same being and others, having experience of the meeting from within but seeing it all in a picture framed by the circumference of her skull. Two such conditions of intercourse with an immortal world are clearly distinguished in the Bible. The messengers of God who appear to patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, walk the earth and are usually called men. They are, indeed, often mistaken for men.² But there is another species of revelation, related in the

¹ sGampopa, *Ibid.*

² For example, the experience of Abraham at Mamre, Genesis xviii.

first person, which begins: 'Then I was in the spirit', or 'Then the heavens were opened.'¹

The prophet Mohammed, also, describes the Messenger of his vocation, first as standing 'two bow-lengths off', and later as throned between heaven and earth.²

In Homer again, the sons and daughters of Zeus who descend from Olympus to make contact with the heroes, are almost always disguised as a human friend or stranger. Athene, for instance, appears to Odysseus, newly landed in Ithaca, as a young shepherd.³ But when these speak directly within the heart, they are immediately recognized as divine, and their demands accord with interior impulses.

In the Hindu Epics there is a wider range of intercourse, owing, in both poems, to the presence of an Avatar on earth, but the distinction holds there also. Arjuna on the field of Kuru speaks with his divine charioteer as pupil to master, but is consciously swept into the being of the Lord of all Worlds, before he returns to the battle.

'First natures impart by illumination the gift of themselves in unenvying abundance', as Proclus too found.⁴ Only the gift is strictly limited by the poor capacity of the mortal follower and graded most tenderly to the stages of his growth, to assure at every stage that equilibrium which appears to be another law of heavenly maintenance.

So, in the writer's experience, the appearances of her helpers in physical life, which began with simple contacts, became varied with her spiritual growth, ranging through many densities of communication, from comparatively objective converse in which (at a very early stage) the actual veins of the feet might be visible, to a fully subjective interpenetration.

These daytime presences may overshadow, or more accurately

¹ As in Revelation i. 10.

² W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammed at Mecca* (Oxford 1953), p. 40, ff. quoting the historian Az-Zukri.

³ Od. xiii. 422.

⁴ Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, VI. Compare 'Dionysius', *The Celestial Hierarchies*: 'Each order is the interpreter and herald of those above it.'

'overshine', material objects. At moments of crisis they may be quite visible in a particular part of a room, from which something of their essential life or light is communicated as a support, and appears to be shared by all present, whether consciously or otherwise. Such external manifestations, often associated with telepathic intercourse, are perhaps projections from a distant source—even a physical one—together with the words and thoughts conveyed. For example, the narrator was once reading a page of closely printed blank verse, when a figure was seen pointing towards it. His finger, bright as silver, became sharpened to reach a single half-line, which was found to read 'I am a Messenger'.

It may be of interest to mention here that hyper-physical communication never consciously occurs to the writer in sleep, which has long ago become dreamless. If, in times of fatigue, any remnant of a dream remains on the edge of consciousness, it is immediately allowed to fade, having only a residual existence, dreary because it is cut off from the higher stations.

This is not to forget, of course, that others have found their most penetrating symbolism in sleep, and Wordsworth seems to have discovered his visions of the night and daytime to be equally valid:

'But huge and mighty forms that did not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.'¹

The second, or main type of experience, which became the conscious product of meditation, began, as we saw, very simply in the presence of a pupil before her instructors. During the passage of many years it has grown prodigiously in dimensions, intensity, definition and variety, each change being linked to some extent with outward change in the writer's life and thought.

The first type of contact involves no alteration in the physical state; in the second there is a partial suspension of animation, a partial independence of the body. The vehicle of action is another

¹ *The Prelude*, I, 398 f.

insubstantial body, usually visible to the participant—although she functions within it—fitted to the conditions of a non-physical state, and capable of change, with its changing environments.

In each of the two categories of experience, the beings who hold regular converse with the disciple appear to be of human rather than of 'angelic' origin. That is to say, they belong to Gampopa's first two classes of spiritual friends. There is a perfume of enormous past history in this world always faintly discernible within their mastery of space and time, however movingly the intensity of their transformations may vary according to the participant's own stage of enlightenment, with intimations of energies which are beyond all human limitations. On certain high occasions within the second phase of communication, the innumerable presences of other orders may be partly visible and therefore related in the unity of the whole, but they are not in direct touch with her as an individual.

Those may be imagined only as sons of an earlier creation, like the God-filled angels or the Bible or Zoroaster's Gathas or the Koran, or like the devas of the Hindus and Buddhists, manipulators of the elements, beside whom these human conquerors of life and death, the saints and sages, offer their praise in the form of guidance to those blindly struggling in their wake.

In their own abode the inhabitants appear at various levels of consciousness or intensities of light, where they are visible in a geometric, or hieratic, interrelationship, which is shared by all present according to their degree of spiritual energy. Here space itself seems to comprise the condition of affinity between beings. 'All things appear near or far according to His presence.'

There is normally no landscape. Figures sometimes move through apparent water or air on a symbolic support such as a lotus, but mountain-tops (thought of as 'the Himalayas'), caves, lakes and flowering fields, have also been known in earlier years. Even these are without horizon.

Whatever the environment, a central point of energy is localized for a particular scene of action. The participant's own movements

are laterally, vertically, or spirally focussed upon this accumulation of being. There is no other gravity.

* Formally speaking, it is 'the world regarded as within the Angel'. How then does Swedenborg, in whose vision all the angelic orders have risen from humanity, proclaim that 'the Heavens as a whole resembles one Man. To know this is the chief thing among the Angels'?¹ The relevance of this statement is perhaps best indicated in the precepts given in the *T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih*, for the creation of the spiritual body during the lifelong process of meditation: 'Heaven is where the body is made in the house of the creative. One holds the heart to the centre in the midst of the conditions, on the fixed pole in the flight of phenomena . . . when the Light circulates, the powers of the whole body arrange themselves before its throne.'² The working basis, says Gampopa, is the most precious human body.³

This is to say that Heaven may be regarded as a changing subjective state reflected in the mirror of human superconsciousness, or, as Eckhart describes it: 'God made himself as Man is, that Man may become as He is', or Plato: 'Man was created that Heaven might be made perfect'.⁴

All visible beings there display a complete beauty, that is, fitness, of thought, shape, movement and gesture. These qualities of grace and courtesy are present simultaneously—that is to say they are derived from each other—but the main sense translated is that of sight. Benediction itself is visible and tangible embracing both 'him that gives and him that takes'. This is a world whose every joy kindles a lasting desire to share it with every living being, though the particular form which it assumes there may be a combined product of the creative imagination.

Thus in the writer's microcosmic experience, the nascent spirit-body moves through an intermediate world between the polarities

¹ E. Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 59.

² Wilhelm and Jung, op. cit., p. 25, *The Book Leng Yen* (Lankavatara Sutra), and p. 24, *The Book of the Yellow Castle*.

³ sGampopa, op. cit., ch. 2.

⁴ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41. B.

of here and there, in which Heaven changes with the opening centres of consciousness, and its inheritors take on increasing reality. They may perhaps be regarded as embodiments, suited to the disciple's weakness, of far higher states of being, in a radiation or alignment such as Dante describes in *Paradise*.¹ They bear her in themselves and are borne within her. So the divine figures are often shown in the painting and sculpture of Northern Buddhism as seated in the heart of the devotee, or one above the other in his headdress. So the Tibetan poet Milarepa can sing of his body as a temple, his heart its altar.²

But forms derived from religious iconography are apt to lose content, after they have served their purpose as the way to a life which escapes perceptible form. That way is afterwards traversed, with their passive aid, by the aspirant in daily exercise.

Certain of the inhabitants of these regions of the heart and mind seem related to the drama of present or recent earthly lives, and these have a special position in support of the traveller in either world. They should perhaps be classed as guardian spirits, or personal daemons in the Platonic sense, with the understanding that their influence is not confined to a single individual.

Their human dimensions may vary with conditions, and are difficult to assess without means of comparison, but where the participant regards herself as separate, they are likely to appear much larger than life, though always proportioned to her comprehension. They have an immediately recognizable individuality, clothed in falling streams of light which absorb the deeper colours by the mere stress of glory. At higher levels the brightness of their garments may be intensified from white to gold, as if sculptured in fire, and thence to the pulsation of a diamond, through which features are at most times sufficiently perceptible to reveal their peculiar character (but this may also be felt without the use of sight), with just discernible differences of manner, sex, age and race. The number of those with whom the writer is in daily com-

¹ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXII, v. 59 ff.

² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (Oxford 1928), p. 215.

munication is small, and has increased very slowly through years of apprenticeship.

These, together with still loftier beings within the range of perception, have their stations at the high points of festival, within the complete area of benediction which extends through all levels of consciousness, holding everything, like a living mandala, in its visible and tangible unity. It is replaced at intermediate times only by echoes and reflections, until the participant has become acclimatized to some new state. In the lesser exercises she sees herself receiving life; in the greater ceremonies she is lost in the unity. This losing is for her the test of highest reality. The effect is some stage of growth which is immediately reflected in the physical world.

At festivals there are often, as we saw, indications of innumerable other presences in a vibration of glory beyond her range, but the smallest awareness in these conditions means relationship in harmony, though only at culminating moments does the aspirant experience the unity of all present. The occurrence of such assemblies is curiously related to both solar and lunar time, so, though holding their own rhythms, they cannot be outside planetary influence. This means, presumably, that they have some connection with physical space also, and possibly even to 'actual' ceremonies.

At festivals the whole atmosphere may be charged with music, but it is, humanly speaking, inaudible to this participant.¹ It may be that such a silence is positive in Simone Weil's sense, when she says that there is silence at the heart of all great paintings, or that the most beautiful music gives the maximum of intensity to a moment's stillness, which constrains the listener to hear the stillness.² The writer recalls her own lifelong rapture in the interval between the falls of sea-waves. But even so, there is never the articulate harmony that Dante heard in the planetary spheres of

¹ In Alice Bailey's marvellous account of the festival, described in her *Unfinished Autobiography* as twice seen in a waking dream, she notes that the patterned movements of those taking part were made in complete silence.

² Simone Weil, *Notebooks*, II, p. 500 (Wills).

Paradise, as the speech of moving lights that were lives.¹ It cannot even be compared with remembered music that sings itself in one's head. It comes nearest, perhaps, in structure to

‘music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts’²

in the same way that the movement and intensity of light may deprive it of colour.

Then too, if heard, the music could perhaps not be borne at this stage of sensitivity. Excessive emotion breaks the other-world experience, though the concentration of sorrow or joy, arising from love, may well act as a send-off for flight. The vehicle of apprehension seems to be the ‘feeling intellect’ beyond the mind’s logic, so that teaching is chiefly by growth of relationship, or change of state. There is, for instance (in the writer’s experience), never a didactic or philosophical dissertation; nothing, in fact, that is immediately limited to teacher and taught.

It seems, indeed, to the recipient consciousness, as if the higher the level of interpenetration, the broader and more insistent becomes the tie with fellow human-beings, and this happens naturally and inevitably, as to one mounting an earthly peak the horizon is both lifted and enlarged.

¹ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXXI, v. 106 f; *Paradiso*, XX, v. 10 f.,

² T. S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages*. Compare John Donne:

‘Since I am coming to that holy room
Where in Thy choir of saints for evermore
I shall be made Thy music, as I come,
I tune the instrument beside the door.’

Evans-Wentz, in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, 1st ed., p. 213, remarks that the ‘invisible superphysical body-aggregate of the perfect spiritual attributes’ can only be experienced as sound, and represents a higher standard of comprehension than the highest visual efficiency.

Transmission of Grace

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER an attempt was made to describe as directly as possible a range of experience for which the essential life appeared to create its own form of expression. It is now time to consider, from the point of view of the aspirant, some of the methods which must be attributed to the hierarchy of inspirers who have gradually made her conscious of a fragment of their designs.

And here it cannot be sufficiently emphasized, that just as Plato in his *Republic* constructed a whole city to show the workings of the human soul 'writ large' for our understanding, so the great descriptions which poets, saints and sages have left behind them 'to speak to those who are beginning to be the servants of love' (as St. Teresa expresses it), are quoted, not for comparison, but to give clarity to a personal record of intercourse, which is worth describing only because it *is* personal. The difference of scale is so obvious that no confusion should arise.

This chapter is concerned with the mechanism of what Keats called 'The Vale of soul-making', by which 'God must be brought to birth in the soul again and again', whether He is thought of as personal or abstract, according to training and temperament. 'What the active intelligence does for the natural man, that and far more does God do for the solitary soul,' says Meister Eckhart. 'He turns out our active intellect, and installing Himself in its stead, He Himself assumes the duties of the active intellect.'

The Indian sage speaks with the same voice: 'There is one form

of the highest God which is eternally redeemed, taking back into itself the created.¹

'How then,' asks Keats, 'are souls to be made? How are these sparks of God to have identity given them, so as to possess a bliss equal to each one's individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this?'² 'One must not wish to leave out the steps' warns the T'ai I Ching.

The human soul, seeking this directed life, is in the position of the 'strange prisoners' of Plato's allegory, who have been watching the shadows of the outer world pass along the walls of their cave, and are reluctantly drawn by one from outside it into the light of the sun, the home of the lives which produced the shadows. Why then should this effort be made? It appears, indeed, to be the whole object of our sojourn; a speeding up of natural processes in order to work in obedience to a higher range of beings, for the sake of all in prison like ourselves.³

All its stages are of the nature of a return, however, gradual, as if to a household of which one has once made a part. They cover the functions, as we saw, of various vehicles or centres of experience, 'a mutual inter-reflection of images', though still related to, the physical body and its working conditions in space and time.

No attempt, therefore, can be made here to define the soul. From the most subtle analysis of the Indian sacred writings, to the comparative simplicity of European mystical psychology, the range is too wide for a simple formula to cover it. It seems better to leave each recorded discovery to speak for itself, of all that lies between bodily sensation and the loss (or gain) of identity in the divine.

The whole process may indeed be considered as the begetting of a spiritual body, or bodies, for which the detachment of normal consciousness is a preparation. But creation in all worlds appears to be the result of a double action. The realm apprehended by the

¹ Shankaracharya, quoted by R. Otto, *East and West*, 1932, ch. x.

² Keats, letter to his brother George, April 30th, 1819.

³ Plato, *Republic*, VII.

writer is of living beings. 'Thus while the celestial Hierarchies are transmitters of Providential life to all below them, they constitute for the aspiring soul which unites itself to them a spiritual ladder of ascent.'¹

Does the Hindu, Tibetan or Chinese injunction to look upon the divine figures, seen in the process of growth, as symbols only, or even as phantoms, contradict these words of Dionysius? The contact or communion which is essential to the enlargement of the scale of knowledge, is shown, by the testimony of those who have lived it, to be effectual according to temperament, whether the light experienced is abstract or embodied. The division may be a religious one, between the prophetic and philosophic modes of cognition. Faith, not science, as Jung puts it, has to determine the reality of the emanations.²

But that still limits the process to the human standpoint. Plato on the other hand describes the intermediate divinities as guides under God in the process of soul-making, 'to their great delight and ours'.³ And Socrates, addressing the judges after his condemnation for impiety, will not be content with the notion of a higher mind alone. He says that supernatural happenings must have supernatural beings to cause them. As he himself confesses, he is speaking as a prophet rather than a philosopher, for he calls in evidence his inner voice, which has not set its negation against any of his actions in facing his accusers. 'In other discussions it has often checked me in the middle of a sentence. . . . What do I suppose to be the explanation? I will tell you. I suspect that this thing that has happened to me is a blessing, and we are quite mistaken in supposing death to be an evil.'⁴

1. Here we come to the simplest, and probably the most common, mode of communication with an invisible monitor in the experience of the writer and no doubt innumerable others. It is a

¹ Dionysius 'the Areopagite', *The Celestial Hierarchies*.

² R. Wilhelm and C. J. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

³ Plato, *Laws*, X.

⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 40, A, B.

positive or negative *comment*, suddenly impressed on the consciousness in daily life, and related to action about to be taken, or to a judgment just formed. This comment is wordless, and (as with Socrates) the negative impact more sharply recognizable than the positive; usually as a warning against something dangerous, hasty, ill-considered or misunderstood.

2. The comment, warning or confirmation, may also define itself more explicitly by a number of *signals*, flashed in the mind's eye, or externally across material objects, as a summons or reminder. They are signs rather than symbols, for they have only a single connotation, like letters of an alphabet or mathematical diagrams. Maps, as if traced in golden wire, are used to call attention to a particular local background or civilization. Single letters, rather strangely, are always Hebrew of the square type, and usually denote the presence of a particular instructor, if his identity is for some reason unrealized.

The shape of a bird may suddenly appear, whose schematic attitudes denote success or failure in understanding, and a series of horses, with or without riders, has the same function. Once the author, at a moment of extreme anxiety on behalf of a friend crossing the Atlantic at the height of the submarine menace, saw the likeness of a collapsed horse and expected disaster. But the friend arrived safely. In later experience the spectator realized that such a sign always indicated false thinking and not a catastrophic event.

One solid group of signs is derived from Greek sculpture. The Discobolus of Myron, for example, either in its correct or its wrongly restored form, often appears during meditation or on the borders of sleep as a warning to hold one's body in a more balanced pose. But the zodiacal sign Libra also has this function, and so has the image of two or more articulated vertebrae.

Even at the higher stages of consciousness an occasional signal may be flashed from 'outside', as a warning that the recipient is intruding an erroneous, that is to say a personal, interpretation of

teaching, or is otherwise failing in attention. This warning may momentarily display some image in the process of disintegration or decay like a smudged painting, which pulls its observer back to concentration by the sheer horror of contrast. It is the only unbeautiful image ever seen. A sudden physical sense of ashes in the mouth often replaces the visible sign, for the link with the material body, though forgotten, is not, of course, severed.

The choice of signals used by the helpers seems to be based, in part at least, on the personal idiosyncrasies of the aspirant. Take, for instance, the use of Greek sculpture noted above. Perhaps for this reason such signs are seldom introduced into the records of Eastern or Western mystics. It cannot be from fear of misapplication by others, since their range of significance is so restricted.

3. The use of *symbols*, on the other hand, is recognized as common to all religious experience. These, unlike the signs, have gathered to themselves a world of meaning out of the common life-history of humanity, which needs no recapitulation here. They are permanent, because living, links between visible and invisible, and can perhaps be called archetypal. They can constitute the actual instruments of other-world activity, their concentration of meanings serving as diagrammatic supports, for example, in an ascent of consciousness, or as channels for the transmission of energy.

4. Before approaching the more comprehensive types of hyper-physical communication, it may be well to mention gesture and touch, which occur both 'here' and 'there'. On the physical plane they have been known to the seeker chiefly in illness, and are important only as illustrating the close relationship of the physical with less substantial vehicles of consciousness; a bond presumably only to be broken when 'the silver cord' is loosened in death.¹

¹ Ecclesiastes xii. 6. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, W. Y. Evans-Wentz, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1952), refers to this link in similar terms. Uido's golden tress, severed by Iris to release her from life in Vergil *Aen.*, IV, has evidently the same significance.

So in the other world there is sometimes a manipulation of bones, which presumably transfers itself to the physical body for the restoration of rhythm, but except in healing or in ceremonial action, tactile particularity is not common, being usually unnecessary since surface forms no barrier whatever:

‘when such bodies join,
There is no touching here nor touching there,’¹

for the lesser is assimilated into the greater.

5. *Vision* is a stage towards such wholeness. Those to whom this mode of communication is familiar, have noted three types of visibility, already referred to in the earlier part of this book:

(a) Forms perceived *bodily* against a physical background; a rather rare occurrence, usually reserved for times of personal crisis. St. Teresa calls this the lowest type of vision, and the one most open to illusion. It was outside the saint’s own experience.

The present writer has never found it illusory, because it has never been merely formal, or its results other than lasting.

(b) *Imaginative*. The form is seen with the eyes of the ‘soul’. ‘The sharing of God’s vision with Himself’, as Eckhart puts it, ‘in His work, is what is known as beauty.’ For Blake this imagination was the *only* apparatus of reality, and from this point of view Nature was to him illusory, like the Indian Maya.

St. Teresa describes her gradual preparation for sight. At first only the hands were apparent. Then;

‘There stood before me the most sacred Humanity, as painters represent Him after the resurrection, in great beauty and majesty . . . The writing of it very greatly distressed me, for one can say nothing without doing great violence to oneself . . . Although the vision was imaginary, I never saw it or any other with the eyes of the body, but only with the eyes of the soul.’²

¹ W. B. Yeats, *Supernatural Songs*, I (The Cuala Press, Dublin 1934).

² St. Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*, ch. xxviii. tr. J. M. Cohen, the Penguin Classics, 1957.

Those words of an incomparably greater recipient of highest grace may excuse the inexpressive standpoint of an ordinary person, but it will be noticed that the Form described was made visible to the saint's imagination through the combined labours of the painters of Christendom.

(c) *Intellectual*. This is 'self-evident, without duality, non-symbolic'. As Swedenborg describes it: 'If my soul knows an angel, it is an image imageless.'¹

St. Teresa reports that before the period of visual experience she was conscious of Christ at her side without seeing him, with greater certainty than if He had been seen:² 'A knowledge brighter than the sun illuminated the understanding.'

She was told by her confessors that this is a higher mode of apprehension than that of the imagination. In the present writer's experience, form may be visible at almost the highest levels that can be borne, while the formless may be localized in a room.

6. *Visualization*. This is the willed attempt, from the human side, to regain contact during meditation with a divine presence, and is built on the memory of some greater experience which was outside the volition of the aspirant. The method is used by her in the subtle body, when communion does not occur spontaneously, either from fatigue or a similar cause. Whether it achieves its result or otherwise, the exercise is profitable in making her familiar with at least the formal appurtenances of some new range of experience. The writer has since found this kind of visualization to be a recognized method in the teaching of yoga, for instance in Tibet, where 'the reflected form of an illusory body' is taken as a standard to measure the disciples' ability to discern beauty.³ St. Teresa specifically states of one stage of enlightenment, that first she made an inward picture. 'Then there followed the presence of God.'⁴

¹ Quoted by A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature into Art*, ch. ii. (1934).

² *Ibid.*, ch. xxvii. 3.

³ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, 1st. ed. (1915), p. 113 note.

⁴ St. Teresa, *id.*

7. *Transmission of Thought.* This is too immediate to appear to be conveyed from one being to another, since it is the product of a state of communion. It cannot therefore be called telepathy, which implies reception from a distance. It may be imparted as an aspect of knowledge or vision, or be translated simultaneously into actual English words.¹ This last type of locution occurs on all levels. The words are physically soundless, but tone and expression are quite distinguishable. In contrast with all the other modes hitherto described, this kind of communication is reciprocal. The rest are one-way methods; this one can take the form of conversation, whether in thought or words.

Unless the condition is fading, there can be no question of confusing another's thought with one's own. In that event there would be over-emphasis, repetition (as if from pressure on an electric bell) and the words would not remain as something alive and creative in the memory. In true transmission 'words are deeds'.

The aspirant's communicative faculties are probably not sufficiently advanced for sustained dialectic like the dialogues described in ancient literature between Krishna and Arjuna, or Hermes and Tat, but the method of imaginative vision or drama may have been chosen instead to accord with her temperament. It is most important to note here that in such interplay the participant's freedom is never jeopardized.² The decision in problems of conscience lies always with her. It will be understood, therefore, that questions of a personal nature have rarely been answered directly, and that statements made by the instructors are never exactly repeated, however earnestly that may be desired. They are plants which must not be uprooted while they continue to grow. The teaching is, as it were, an organic aspect of these 'purely proceeding spirits', who rise in us as we in them. Remorse is not valid here, where cause and

¹ So Blake was perfectly justified in explaining to the incredulous Crabb-Robinson that Voltaire's spirit-French came to him in English 'like the touch of a musical key' (*Reminiscences*, quoted in Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, Everyman's Library, 1942, p. 341).

² Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead*, vi. 8.

effect are simultaneous, but its results, carried from physical life, may strengthen spiritual awareness.

9. Beyond all distinctive converse, we come to *Interpenetration*, which only supervenes completely at the height of vision, when 'every choir and every crown is vanished', and all differences between immortal and mortal are seemingly dissolved; where not even thought is necessary. Presumably this denotes some beginner's stage of what St. Teresa calls 'the complete transformation of the soul in God'. There appears to be an atomizing of the double vehicle, so that the other-world body becomes invisible and insubstantial in its own sphere, and all its particles are in movement, 'changed in an instant from glory to glory'.

The darkness of negation which always follows it is broken by a spark or seed of light; what Charles Williams beautifully calls a firefly's egg, whose hatching is an explosion of new forms for new action.

This seems to be what Lama Anagarika Govinda in a recent book calls the point, drop, gem, seed from which inner and outer space have their origin, and in which they become one again.¹ From the standpoint of the evolution of consciousness, this 'germ of the unfolding of inner space, and last point of its integration' may correspond with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's great conception of the Omega point to which all creation may be considered to converge.²

Such an experience is usually prepared for by signals and other appearances; perhaps many hours beforehand, and leaves a permanent change of state. But it is evident that even this is only a resting-place along the Sacred Way, and that vision, locution, interpenetration, are recurring methods of access to life as it is raised by degrees into fuller life.

Throughout this chapter the writer has had to describe categories of communication beyond her physical experience, as

¹ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, (Rider, London 1959). *passim*.

² In *The Phenomenon of Man*, 1959, 'The Ultimate Earth.' *passim*.

contacts with higher lives, because such has been their form of expression from her youth onwards. The scenes and images are real to her because their life is felt to be greater than themselves and remains when they are gone.¹

To put the matter on an infinitely vaster scale, as the life of an atom may be explained by a solar system, Eckhart's grand saying may perhaps describe this best: 'God makes Himself as we are, that we may become as He is.'

But from the standpoint of the climber there is again continually heard the warning, most insistent in the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist theologies, that the divine forms encountered on the journey are illusions.

Well, a mirage is illusory, but it is created by an actuality elsewhere. The writer, lost with others in the desert of Iraq, has more than once been guided by a mirage to its source on the desired route. The most beautiful of such experiences was the sight of a leaping golden dome, appearing and vanishing at intervals like a bubble in the sky, above the distant and invisible sacred city of Nejf, thus transforming a desultory track into a pilgrim's road.

An astronomer, too, sees his stars only as they have existed in past ages, yet he can base upon their configurations a workable conclusion for the present time.

So in the *Paradiso* Dante converses with the inhabitants of the sphere of Saturn as bodiless whirls of light and song. Yet he is told that their bodies exist at a far more exalted level round the throne of God.² There, at last, he finds them.

This matter, then, of the acceptance or rejection of images, which roughly divides Far Eastern and Western mystical experience, holds the startling possibility that both systems may be valid; the existence of a hierarchy of living beings above mankind, and the world of abstract ideas, also alive, somewhere held in union by a transcendent reality.³

¹ Cf. Dante, *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 92. 3, 'I think that I beheld it, because more largely, in saying this, I feel that I rejoice.'

² Dante, *Paradiso*, xxii. 78 ff.

³ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *op. cit.* pp. 116, 117.

Plato nearly always, when metaphysics gave way to religion, plunged into myths of some part of the soul's journey, and so made it possible for the Hermetics and the Christian Fathers, the Kabbalists and the sages of mediæval Islam, to place their angelic worlds on a philosophical basis. Although the Vedanta, and most of the other Hindu systems derived from it, lay such emphasis on the non-existence of individuality, the Bhagavad Gita, like all the Christian mystical treatises, returns to a personal relationship. There the tension is rendered from both sides, even in the tremendous scene of the God's transfiguration. There must surely be a mode of truth which includes both the prophets and the philosophers. 'All things,' said Blake, 'are comprehended in these Eternal Forms within the Divine Body of the Saviour.' The conception trembles in the breath of an inconceivable freedom.

Time Redeemed

HERE AGAIN, in attempting to describe a straightforward experience, it is necessary to fall back on analogy, since the infinitely variable response to individual search is always unique as a work of art is unique, and exists only within its own conditions. But as we saw at the beginning of this enquiry, before a painting can be achieved in the physical world, an inner transmutation of forms must occur.¹

Similarly the aspects of space-time in which the soul can be said to have a history, require to be brought into relationship with the limited conditions of the natural world, before that soul can become a ruler, in company with the entire universe, of its own minute portion of destiny; that is to say, before it can freely choose, like the heroes of the great tragedies, its necessary doom.

Albertus Magnus, the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas, has analysed for us three characteristics of space, starting from the circumstances of substantial being, and ending with the vision of unity:

‘A thing is said to be in space by *circumscription* when beginning, middle and end can be assigned to it in space, or if its parts are measured by the parts of space. In this sense the body is in space.

A thing is said to be in space by *definition* when it is here in such a sense as not to be elsewhere. In this sense the Angels are in space, for an Angel is where he is operative. And according to Damas-

¹ Since this was written, Prof. E. H. Gombrich has published his *Art and Illusion* in illustration of this theme.

cenus, this is the case with disembodied souls. I say disembodied, because the soul when united with the body is in the same place as the person in his totality.

A thing is said to be in space *repletively* because it fills space.

Thus God is said to be in every place because He fills every place.¹

In such an analysis, space by definition governs the placing of forms as in a painting or drama, and brings us back to what was said earlier in this record concerning the architecture of subjective space, 'a property of our consciousness' in which distance is felt as the dynamic inter-relationship of all beings, who, in place of the planets, radiate in their stations the light received from above.

That is perfectly summarized in Dante's 'impassioned diagram of space' existing in the *primum mobile*: 'And this heaven has no other "where" than the divine mind, in which is kindled the love which revolves it and the power which it sheds.'² Well may Paul bid us 'Pray that ye may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height . . . that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.'³

But the prophet Isaiah sees such 'where' sweep into itself the instruments of time:

'The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be for thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.'⁴

Having acknowledged the inassailability of these tremendous affirmations, an attempt should be made to reconcile the wholeness of that world in its perceptible relations, however metaphorical, with planetary recurrence, since the experiences of the subtle body, described in the two previous chapters, appear to be located at a 'point of intersection' both in and out of ordinary time. That is to say, although their other-world speed differs intrinsically from the

¹ Albertus Magnus (Metzcor). Quoted in the Temple classic edition of Dante's *Purgatorio*, p. 321.

² Dante, *Paradiso*, xxvii, vv. 109-111.

³ Ephesians iii. 18, 19.

⁴ Isaiah lx. 19.

rhythmic intervals known to us, some temporal concordance evidently exists between these two modes of being. Certain celebrations, for instance, have, as we saw, a recognizable dependence on lunar and solar recurrence,¹ and it is in religious ritual that the closest analogy can be found, to the extempore sequence of the soul's apparent progress towards its source.

For this appears to take place in an intermediate world where 'Eternity enters time through the agency of moments'. This duality is familiar in monumental art and ritual, which may immortalize the past (whether mythological or historical makes no fundamental difference), by lifting it into a perpetual present.

Thus the Babylonian New Year's Festival re-enacted the primary battle for the creation of world-order, in the annual ceremonies for renewal of the state; so the life—and death—cycle of Osiris was performed in Egypt at the king's coronation and at intervals throughout his reign. So again, the Buddhist Wesak and the festival of Passover, or the wonderful seasonal rites of the Christian year, celebrate single historical events which move most directly within the discipline of planetary time. Memory is the connecting link, providing a passage between worlds, which are still sufficiently dense to allow perception to travel slowly through time to yield a past and future before 'it is rolled into now'.² Like beauty in the physical world, recollection remains our instrument of higher perception in the world of thought, as Plato has repeatedly declared.

The enormity of time need hold no more terror than that of space, if we can thus become integrated within the sacrifice of its perpetual transformations.

This double aspect appears valid also for those experiences in the physical world which would seem to impinge on events beyond a personal lifetime. Whatever their true significance they must be allowed their place here, if only because of their causal involvement in the present. Their significance for the present day

¹ Above, p. 49.

² Compare Rodney Collin, *The Theory of Eternal Life* (1951).

seems, in fact, a test of their quality. Nevertheless, the unique history of every individual is so much bound with all others, that any precise tracing of separate paths covering earlier lifetimes can presumably be made only by a being who has attained enlightenment, and with it the power to enter into the lives of others.

Isolated memories of past ages (if such they may be called when the very act of recollection, or reliving of another character on life's stage, shows them to be part of one's present existence), are in the writer's experience of a momentary (but not a transitory) nature. That is, they are not stretched out in space and time, though they may be mentally unwound, in the manner of a spring, from the point of the vision, which is timelessly complete and self-contained like a painting, and real within its limits as a painting is real.

In contrast, the unwinding is impure, that is to say, it is mixed with thought, and therefore less intense, reliable and persistent than the original vision, which remains alive and unaltered within and beyond any such admixture. The vision, like the scene of a play, is both experienced from within and contemplated from without. It is not willed, as the unwinding is. The process will probably be better understood from the illustrations given below.

As seen from without, 'in the mind's eye', the vision is set in a unit of historic time-and-space. Its causal extensions are deduced in the unwinding, out of the intensity of the vision's subjective impact. This is the most dependable result of the unwinding.

One may recall Proust's joyful acknowledgment of such moments outside time's succession, which were his only intimations of immortality.¹ He knew the unwinding also, for he made it the basis of his creations. And Mozart wrote in a letter that he could hear a future musical composition in his mind, sometimes for its entire length, but sometimes 'gathered into one'.²

From the first three personal examples chosen below, it will be seen that the occurrence portrayed in the vision is not in itself a

¹ Marcel Proust, *Du Côté de chez Swann*, Bk. I, p. 69, and *Le Temps Retrouvé*, Bk. II, p. 11 f.

² Zahn, *Mozart*, vol. III, pp. 423-5.

dramatic action, but always a moment of enlightenment before such action, when the character foresees it in the concentration of fear or resolve, as an event which is inevitably approaching. The experience is therefore a vision within a vision, both being independent of our movement of time. But the mentally impelled unwinding is concerned with the resulting action as a drama in imagined time.

These experiences have always occurred during waking consciousness in the physical world; often, for instance, when listening to an orchestra. Although the music disappears for the outward duration of the vision, its harmonies offer it a soundless support.¹

Most of the writer's 'recollections' of this kind happened spontaneously many years ago, during a brief period of her early life, when a concentration of events and relationships called for a wider interpretation than the known circumstances allowed.² They were not consciously sought, so there was no technique prepared for them in the imagination—except, of course, a training in aesthetic visualization.

The phase of illumination of 'past' events which were always by analogy contemporary, lent itself also to occasional glimpses of the future in a similar state of spontaneity.³ Both these aspects are now quite rare, and purposely so, from a necessity, it seems, to live more consciously in the present, in order to keep a just balance between two states of living, especially at this time in which the external world is deprived of many of its usual stimulations.

There is also a deeper reason. In these intermediate stages of the soul's return journey, the temporal must be continually gathered up into the 'eternal', where only its results are significant, for cause and effect can no longer be regarded in such phases as separate. One must become practised, even in daily life, in the Eternal Moment, in order to become naturalized in the world outside normal time.

From early childhood, it may be remembered, the writer had

¹ Compare p. 50, above.

² See p. 27, above

³ The simultaneity, or timeless moment, did not of course exist as such in the physical world. Often some time seems to have elapsed during the apparently momentary experience of the vision, when the writer changed from spectator to participant.

a sense of the past which was almost an obsession, together with a strong capacity for dramatic visualization. Over a long period she was a subjective spectator of perpetual fighting in 'Troy', in which the hero was encouraged, or restored to activity, by a priestly teacher who sometimes came alive for her; at which point his pupil's warfare became her own. Such a symbolic contrivance of the imagination appears to have no connection with the series of experiences which may be provisionally called recollections, and which, once admitted into the consciousness, remained there. The relation of these with the writer's present life (where any relation could be discerned) was always a causal one, throwing light on contemporary events and often including some phase of the lives of others. At one time she drew up a table of twenty-five such 'past lives', most of which were quite fragmentary and vague, but a few gave lasting significance to certain aspects of her own journey, and so were not entirely past, and could not possibly be ignored, as the Tale of Troy was ignored as soon as a more direct line of communication with spiritual leaders had been established. The Tale, only partly illusory like the conscious visualization of divine forms described in Chapters 3 & 4, had played a similar part of invocation.

The first of the 'recollections' referred to took place in the little wood mentioned in the first part of this book as the scene of the writer's earliest encounter with a teacher in a setting of physical life. It happened, if her memory is correct, not long afterwards, and was quite unexpected.

She watched, at first as a spectator, the large-eyed profile of a girl of perhaps fifteen, which emerged from heavily crimped hair above a wide pleated sleeve. The figure stood completely still within a little chapel, on a river-bank raised above vivid tree-tops in which many birds sang.¹ The spectator thought of the river as the Nile.

The girl was expecting an event already foreseen, in an

¹ This was one of the only two occasions in the series in which sound was audible. The other was in the Indian garden described on p. 70 below. Before this the songs of birds had no distinguishing characteristics for the young aspirant absorbed in visible nature. From now onwards they became her concern.

entranced state of voluntary and complete possession, as if by a divinity or his priest, and in an utter simplicity of mind which held room only for the words which she must speak.

As in the other examples to be touched on, the character was first seen most vividly from outside and then immediately known from within. In this instance the stationary moment was long. Beyond it another character became visible—her brother, brimful with indescribable vitality in contrast to her passive stillness—come to lead her to the scene where she must utter judgment upon a witch, in the presence of their father, the local ruler.

The unwinding which followed is of no importance to this narrative, but note the likeness of its opening phase to the two episodes related below.

In the first of these the spectator was in a concert hall, seated behind the orchestra, and thus facing the dimly seen auditorium. As the music rose to a climax this became an amphitheatre blazing with sunshine, in which the single figure was noticeable, of a woman in her early thirties, the motionless white folds of her dress, her white shoulder and the gold ornaments above it, all burning in the intense light. The heavy waves of her red-brown hair were confined in a golden net; the dark eye that was visible stared unseeing towards the stage. She looked proud and therefore aloof, but the spectator was now feeling with the strange woman's heart and mind, which was wholly imprisoned in a tumult of horror and fear. This, the watcher knew, concerned the actions of a boy of about sixteen, on whose shoulder her hand was resting, seen from behind and clothed in a chlamys of shimmering sea-coloured material, over which his light hair hung down in formal curls.

The participant tried to force her gaze round the corner, as it were, to see the boy's face, but with the effort, the blue dimness of a London afternoon became once more apparent in the auditorium, rocked with the tremendous harmonies of *Götterdämmerung*.¹

¹ It is just possible that the music's theme of spell-bound deceit and treachery called up the day-dream. If so, the vision still existed in its own right, and continued to do so in after years.

The unwinding of that particular moment of shock and tension continued through many later reveries, till the whole story became not only coherent, but relevant to the present day. It may even have offered a new chance to redeem a past in which the mother failed to save her son from moral degradation. If so, the opportunity was never fully taken.

The third experience took place at another concert, where once again a figure stood absorbed in thoughts of the immediate future; this time a tall man in the gold-brown habit of a Buddhist monk, who was standing on the platform of a staged tower, or early form of pagoda, located in what the spectator afterwards thought of as western China. His strongly accentuated profile, lit by the setting sun, bore little resemblance to the unemphatic features of the modern Chinese, as he contemplated the course of action on which he was completely resolved. Its details were not then perceptible to the watcher.

A youth, clad in the coarse dark robe of an acolyte, knelt sobbing at his feet, and the participant could feel the pressure of his hot hand on that of the priest. He was imploring his master not to take the dangerous action which he had in mind, but could not shake his resolution.

In a later unwinding, what they both foresaw took place. Since the spectator on this occasion only watched the scene of the priest's death from the outside (he was stabbed in the throat in the midst of a hostile crowd) it was just possibly the visualization, not of what occurred, but only of what was in both their minds on the tower.¹

The similarity of formal pattern in these three experiences, cannot escape notice. Perhaps such 'reminiscence' has its own stylistic tendencies, like all visualization. The most beautiful, however, of the series of 'memories'—if it was not indeed a vision within a vision—does not quite fit their pattern, and can best be related in its temporal succession, though it was concentrated like the others upon a single moment.

It depicts a singing woman from the 'Isles of the Sea', her past

¹ See p. 65 above for the limited reliability of secondary developments.

life in ashes, who with her little boy had travelled the long caravan routes across Western Asia, led from Egypt by a dream, and earning transport for them both by her poems and songs, till she entered a garden so richly coloured with chanting crowds, that they were scarcely distinguishable from its flowering shrubs and trees.

Deep within it sat the Buddha, and ranged in order within his halo the arhats made a sunset of rose and gold.

The woman was emboldened by grief to approach, leading her child, and heard a voice that held all music speaking, in the very dialect of her lost Aegean island, his prophecy of their future.

Now it seems clear that an entranced Egyptian child, willingly obedient to a higher compulsion,¹ a formidable Athenian matron obsessed with her own moral dilemma, a learned Chinese priest, weighed down with intellectual pride, who had given his life's devotion to Maitreya, the Buddha who is to come, and this island woman out of an earlier age; a traveller to a goal like his own, but fed by emotion, are not the same person in various critical settings, although they do appear to share certain indestructible aspirations.

These characters, nevertheless, together with others, however mysteriously interrelated, seem to have contributed some results of their experience, for good and ill, to significant aspects of the writer's particular history.

It is her strong conviction that in this phase of the soul's journey, the past must be redeemed in a 'harrowing of hell'. So perhaps it is recalled to memory in an affirmation of unity which carries it into the present, like the position of the sinner in the act of repentance. This can only be accomplished in the physical body, because only there is time seen as historic continuity. But even in the act of recall, time is rolled into its moment as a 'moving image of eternity'. The events take on full significance as they become a part of their consequences.

¹ The unseen priest was thought of as the teacher who had first appeared in that same wood in which this vision occurred. But in present-day life any such compulsion is unthinkable.

PART III

Difference Agrees with Itself

Introductory

THE FRAGMENTARY RECORDS of communication with other conditions of existence as set down in the previous chapters, could be described only because their narrator was traversing some ground of individual experience which extended beyond the prison of personality.

By contrast, this section will touch upon the tremendous affirmations which sprang to life among the builders of our civilization, when the mythical foundations had been transformed by a few prophets and sages, chiefly within the space of the same centuries, into individual systems of belief.

Rudolf Otto, in his *Religious Essays*,¹ speaks of a Law of Parallel Development between all the vital creeds. Beyond it he sees a convergence of type which never leads to identity, any more than it does in organic evolution. This proceeds from a universal groundwork which is apparent in all primitive cultures, and remains clearly discernible still, in the higher religions which have partly absorbed and partly repudiated it. This substratum, reaching back to beginnings which are articulate only in the arts and social customs which have been revealed by anthropology and archaeology, or in myths remembered in the poetry and ritual of later ages, already carries with it a prevision of psychological unity, in which its pristine experience of participation and sacrifice may become explicit.²

¹ Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays*, *passim*.

² See G. R. Levy, *The Gate of Horn* (1948), *passim*.

But 'so great a mystery cannot be reached by following a single road', as Symmachus has told us.¹ The disparity between the world religions of civilization as developed by their Planters among the races in which they found appropriate soil, seems to have held an equal importance with their similarity, so that between them they might comprehend and reveal, on a planetary scale, all the modes of the soul's activities which have been developed in the known space of history. 'God Himself, taking the Forms imagined by His worshippers, makes Himself as we are, so that we may be as He is.'²

But to a whole group of related religions that is a statement of unequivocal blasphemy. In turning from a common world of primitive myth and ritual 'which reveals such constant features that the innumerable mythologies of the world are like dialects of a single language',³ to the lofty metaphysical ascensions which have shaped our culture, we find two main creative types which roughly divide the historic East and West, according to the aspects of divine and human activity upon which they have severally been concentrated. Among our spiritual progenitors in the Middle East this was the drama of the battle between good and evil, earliest known in the ceremonial of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Phoenicia, most clearly defined in the theology of Zoroastrian Persia, raised to new grandeur in the thought of Judaea during and after the captivity, and in the affirmation of Islam.

There are memories of this warfare in its mythical and pre-historic phase in all the Indo-European epics describing the battles of Gods with Giants, and also outside the transmission of our inheritance, in the Nahuatl hymns of Mexico.⁴ Its outcome is the revelation of the unapproachable goodness of God, and of man as the creature and servant of God in the Law. Its spokesman is the Prophet, its sphere of contest is action.

The philosophical systems, on the other hand, of India and

¹ Q. Aurelius Symmachus, to St. Ambrose, when told to forget teachings previous to St. Paul.

² Meister Eckhart, see p. 60, above.

³ J. Campbell, in introduction to Maya Deren's *The Divine Horsemen*.

⁴ I. Nicholson in *Firefly in the Night* (1958) has translated many of these.

China have proclaimed most forcibly the essential unity of man's Self with the divine order, and his goal of absorption, after aeons of interior discipline, through knowledge of the divine and rejection of the material world. Their aim is liberation by enlightenment and their spokesman is the Sage, who is the eventual recipient, through assimilation of his divine nature, of revelation.

India and Judaea thus emerge as two ancestral fountains of this dichotomy—philosophic against dramatic, cyclic against historical, cultural against prophetic—of the endeavour to realize one's unity with the divine against the fundamental separation of God and man, of matter regarded as illusion and matter seen to be holy because it is God's creation.

Of course there are innumerable crossings and wanderings to and fro in theory and practice, chiefly along the course of Greek religious philosophy, which, whatever its origins, formed a tributary between East and West, so that the Christian and Moslem theologians of the Middle Ages drew their substance from the confluence of both sources.

The inheritance from the *primaeval* world, of participation in seasonal change, and of rebirth through sacrifice, was a third and very deep foundation of historic religion, itself non-historic and cyclic, which became interwoven with the intellectual achievements of India and Greece, perhaps by assimilation of Indo-European conquerors with the indigenous peoples who had developed a civilization in both regions. Later the involuntary shunning became voluntary on the one hand in the ideal of the Bodhisattvas; mortals who after untold ages of effort to attain liberation, were pledged to renounce it until every seed of life in the universe had found enlightenment, and on the other in the incarnation among erring humanity of the Supreme God himself, periodically in the Hindu Avatars, historically and symbolically in the Christ. The representative is the Saviour; love is the divine aspect.

It is proposed in the later chapters of this book to investigate these three channels of revelation, as expressed by the Prophet, the Philosopher and the Redeemer, whose victorious paths appear

to have traced the very pattern trodden so tentatively by seemingly isolated mystics. The religions which they set in motion may have drawn upon the most primitive sources of union, but it is at their highest points that they converge. It should therefore be profitable to consider what confirmation, and what clarifying rejections, they bring to the discoveries of the human spirit in their own sphere of action.

The Prophets

WITH THE IMPORTANT EXCEPTION of Zoroaster, the gift of prophecy, as defined above, may be regarded as a peculiar prerogative of the Semitic race. The prophets always begin their mission with the recognition of God as a transcendent being who is yet near to them, whose reality they proclaim to an ignorant or erring people, and whose commands they transmit as the Law. Their own communication is with angels, either disguised as men in the physical world, or within their own sphere. Such prophets are intolerant, because their struggle is against opposition in the world of affairs, but nevertheless they share a message. Their common revelation is the Justice of God.

The prophet is alive in the religion of Zoroaster, who taught in Persia towards the end of that period of intense spiritual creativity, during the eighth to fifth centuries before Christ, when prophetic and philosophic teachers were springing up in the most vital centres of the Near and Farther East; a period shared by the Buddha and Pythagoras, by the greatest of the Jewish prophets, and by Confucius and Laotze. Zoroaster is to be regarded as a prophet because his declaration of the Goodness of God gave the Persian peoples their peculiar character of moral energy, and because he proclaimed the human body to be the organ of free will, essential to man as a moral being. The later Jewish, Christian and Muslim prophetic conceptions of the world have all passed under his influence.

Before their conquest by Persia the prophets of Israel had a

local mission; after that contact it extended through the known world, in which Jesus was at home.

As with the Semitic prophets, an account of Zoroaster's experience of revelation survives. He had withdrawn from the world for meditation at twenty years old. At thirty his mission was imparted to him beside a river-bank, where the Archangel Vohu Manah led him before the throne of God. This was the first of seven great visions in which, during the next ten years, he held converse with his Lord amid the divine Orders.

There followed a life of wandering, of unsuccessful battles with the priesthood of Iranian orthodoxy, but in his last decade his new faith seems to have been securely established within the Empire.

In that system he is considered to hold an intermediate rank between Gods and men. Although he is expected to return with the Saviour of the Messianic Age at the end of the present world-history, to establish peace on earth, he is not, though chief of innumerable angels, a divine being who has taken incarnation to redeem mankind. It is fundamental and unique to his doctrine, that all men can become God's allies in fighting the Evil One for the establishment of His justice: 'As holy did I conceive thee when I saw thee, the Eternal, at the birth of existence, appoint a recompense for deed and word through thy virtue at the turning-point of creation.'¹

In the earliest records of Zoroaster's revelation, the struggle is between Order and Disorder, as in early Greek myths, and in his divine world both human and angelic orders make their choice: 'To them did the wise Lord, united with Good Mind and in close companionship with Truth, make answer from his kingdom, Holy and Good and Rightmindedness do we choose. Let it be ours.'²

In the Gathas Ahura Mazda is creator of both light and darkness, his instrument being the Voice, or Word. So the supreme God is

¹ Quoted in R. C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (1958).

² *Yasna*, 32. 1-2.

responsible for the Destructive element also, that the wise may choose the good.¹ As it was with the Jewish and Muslim prophets, but not for most of the philosophers of India and Greece, the opposition of Good and Evil was active and basic to present existence, both human and divine. It is this affirmation that places Zoroaster among the greatest of the prophets. He is with all prophecy in his emphasis on historic time as the period appointed for the struggle with the Arch-fiend, into which the Archetypal angels, spirits of the first creation, are born by choice for his overthrow. But like the Babylonian Kingu and the Dragon of the Apocalypse he will be bound, but not destroyed, at the end of the Aeon, when all souls shall find wholeness with their bodies (perhaps their essential forms). Thus historic time appears as a part of Boundless Time.

Zoroaster is with the mystic sages of his period, in his recognition of guardian angels of an earlier creation as associated with man before birth, to be his companions through life and death, but few or none of the early systems betray the completeness of his vision of the angelic orders ranked above visible creation about the Throne, who carry out the supreme commands along the paths of light, or of the lesser Gods and Goddesses as formulations of qualities linked with all Nature by their relation to the elements.² It may be that the definition given to this heavenly order, both in Greek philosophy and Christian theology, was inherited from Zoroaster before it pervaded Western mysticism.

Like other prophets he was concerned with the reform of ritual and there is about his ordinances of service an extreme purity which blows like a clean wind over the blood-stained altars of his polytheistic contemporaries. The pure mind is fed on the free will of man as a moral being, and life on earth is therefore dramatic as the sphere of decisive action. Its relation to the sacrifice will meet us in the consideration of world redeemers, but in his epoch only the Buddha and Pythagoras beside him seem to have cleansed the altars

¹ See A. V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroastrian Studies* (Columbia 1928), *passim*.

² *Ibid*, chap. 5.

of blood. But some of the Hebrew prophets were now declaring that a humble and contrite heart was more acceptable than the fat of rams.

Next to this comprehensive and sublime preacher of duality in unity, the earlier patriarchs of Israel appear groping in splintered light, though their revelations are of the building of a race. For them there are as yet no visions of archangels and angelic orders. They do not enter heaven but their direct intercourse is of the very substance of prophecy, with its sudden revelations of a transcendent God through angels who walk the earth disguised as men. Words may be spoken plainly to the heart, but the grace of visual contact is veiled by a 'similitude'. Abraham under the oak tree of Mamre,¹ and Lot in Sodom,² courteously offer hospitality to their angelic visitors, believing them to be men, and Jacob wrestles all night with a 'man' before facing his wronged brother. But after defeat he understands their relationship, and asks his blessing, and is given a new name in token of rebirth.³

The experience of the prophets throughout the Old Testament is consistent in this, and is inherited by Islam. A revelation comes through an angel, or angels—the shift to plurality is one of its signs. The divine guests of Mamre and Sodom are referred to as 'they', and 'he', and the 'Lord'; and in a similar manner the instrument of Mahommed's first message begins as 'the Truth', then becomes 'the angel', and later 'the angels'. But if the Hebrew prophets of the captivity such as Zechariah, speak alternatively of 'the angel that talked with me' (evidently his guardian angel) and 'the man that stood among the myrtle trees',⁴ they are as often entranced within a whole world of angelic beings and emblematic beasts, now made articulate, perhaps, in the land of their exile. Their physical bodies are fallen, either in 'deep sleep' or in a voluntary gesture of obeisance, but always they are raised by a hand, or bidden to stand upright, in order that the prophet's other-world intercourse may

¹ Genesis xviii. 1-15.

² Genesis xix. 1-3.

³ Genesis xxxii. 24-30.

⁴ Zechariah i. 8-14.

be face to face, image to image, in a visionary body made level in communication with that which descends to engage it.¹

By this time Heaven has a fixed structure. The sapphire pavement in Exodus² is the forerunner of Ezekiel's 'And above the firmament was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness or appearance of a man.'³ The throne of precious stones reappears in the Apocalypse of St. John,⁴ and the use of 'likeness' here shows that the symbolic nature of the imagery was well understood.

Even Moses, the founder of his nation's spiritual entity, as Abraham had been its physical ancestor, could not to the end of his life see the glory of God which he desired, but he yet received more than the rest: 'If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches, and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.'⁵

This was direct communication without sight: 'The cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses . . . And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh to his friend . . . Thou hast said, I know thee by name. Thou hast found grace in my sight . . . And he said, My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.'⁶

Being a prophet of the highest rank, what came to Moses thus directly was the Law, and it is suggested at least once in the record, that the angelic hosts were not the only instruments of its transmission between the throne and chosen humanity: 'He shined forth upon Mt. Paran, he came with ten thousand saints: from his right

¹ St. John, in Revelation xix. 10, is perfectly explicit: 'And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not. I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'

² Exodus xxiv. 10.

³ Ezekiel i. 26.

⁴ Revelation iv. 3.

⁵ Numbers xii. 6-8.

⁶ Exodus xxxiii. 9-14.

hand went forth a fiery law for them.¹ This was the power of life. In later ages the Kabbalists were to recognize the Law as a living being, standing like the figures of the Egyptian Maat and the Zoroastrian Vohu Manah and the Greek Diké, at the right hand of God.

In Islam also, when the highest Prophet becomes the transmitter of the Law, 'the spirits of the Prophets' are ranged with the angels as intermediaries between the always separated God and man.²

The direct speech, even through the angel, at first struck terror in both Hebrew and Moslem revelation. In this even the greatest of all the prophets stood apart from the mystic sages to whom the realization of imminence was the gradual result of inner training for grace. The terrific shock of prophetic revelation always set going a course of action in the world of men, which opposed the existing order and roused antagonists to defend it. For Moses and Mahomed alike, this action was the creation of nations out of desert wanderers.

Each of these prophetic archetypes, like their lesser brothers, knew fear not only from the mere impact of the divine life, but because each saw himself totally inadequate to be its spokesman. That is, they could not believe in their new wholeness: 'And Moses said unto the Lord, Oh Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth?'³

So Isaiah, after the primal vision of the Lord in the midst of heaven of the seraphim, crying to each other 'Holy, holy, holy': 'Then I said Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand . . . and he touched my mouth with it and said, Lo, this

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 2.

² W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practices of Al-Ghazali* (1953), p. 61, quoting 'The Deliverance from Error', para. 133.

³ Exodus iii. 1-5.

hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquity is taken away . . . and I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I, send me. And he said Go.¹

So also Ezekiel when he stood among the captives on the river-bank, and saw the heavens opened, and the firmament as a terrible crystal, and the likeness of the sapphire throne upon which was the likeness of a man. 'As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon Thy feet and I will speak to thee.'² If the human participant prostrates himself or falls, he is always raised to receive the message 'mouth to mouth'. Daniel, for example: 'So I was left alone. . . . Then was I fallen into a deep sleep . . . with my face towards the ground. And behold a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, thou man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to thee, and stand upright, for unto thee am I now sent; and . . . I stood trembling.'³

Perhaps the most remarkable of these narratives is the dialogue with Jeremiah at his summons to prophecy, for it reveals, for once, a relationship transcending the small moment of action: 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child . . . I am with thee to deliver thee . . . Behold I have put my words into thy mouth.'⁴

The command to stand up, whether in the physical or more subtle bodies, puts these men in a different category from the oracles of Greece; the Pythia and Sibyls who acted as mediums for

¹ Isaiah vi. 1-9.

² Ezekiel i. 1-5; 26, 28.

³ Daniel x. 8, 9-11.

⁴ Jeremiah i. 4-9.

the God.¹ Vergil's description of Apollo riding the Sibyl at Cumae before she guided Aeneas through the other worlds, or the haunted Cassandra of the tragic poets, make that sufficiently clear.²

The free acceptance by the Prophets of their mission, once it has been revealed, invariably succeeds their initial shrinking from action. As Amos describes both these phases, himself a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees, summoned from following the flock: 'The Lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?'³

The position of Elijah is unique among these men because he forms a link with the after-age which was to transcend prophecy, and because he resembles the cave-dwelling hermits of other lands, and like them hands on his power to a disciple and overcomes death. But of his call to prophecy at the cave-mouth there is the wonderful record: 'And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.'⁴

All these phenomena make external the subjective experience of the traveller between two states of being—of the mystic who is not necessarily a prophet, and such a glimpse of a more universal psychology is a reminder of the strange assimilation between past and future tenses in Hebrew verbs, which enhances the peculiar timelessness conferred by prophecy upon their profound (if narrow) conception of history.

More than a thousand years later, the experience of Mohammed, who regarded all these as his spiritual ancestors, and his message as a

¹ But Plutarch *de Pyth. Orac.* VII, describes something of the conditions of prophecy, 'The voice is not that of a god, nor the utterance, nor the diction, nor the metre. All these are the woman's; he puts into her mind only the images, and creates a light in her soul.'

² See Maya Deren, *The Divine Horseman*, for just such possession in Haiti at the present day.

³ Amos iii. 8.

⁴ 1 Kings xix. 11-13. The whirlwind and fire occur also in Ezekiel i. 4.

fulfilment of their message, is no less overwhelming, no less conclusive of acknowledged weakness transformed to more than human power for the building of nations.

At forty his vision 'came to him like the breaking of dawn'. The account preserved by the historian Az-zukri is very striking. 'Afterwards solitude became dear to him, and he would go to a cave on Hira to engage in devotional exercises. At length unexpectedly the Truth came to him and said: O Mohammed, thou art the Messenger of God.

'I had been standing, but I fell to my knees; then I crept away, my shoulders quaking; then I entered Khadijah's chamber and said, Cover me, cover me, until the terror left me. Then he came to me and said, O Mohammed, thou art the Messenger of God.'

What followed resembled Jacob's wrestling with the angel at the ford: 'Then he said, Recite. I said, I cannot recite. Then he took me and squeezed me vehemently three times, until exhaustion overcame me; then he said, Recite in the name of thy Lord who created thee. And I recited.'

The historian continues: 'There was a gap for a time in the revelation to the Messenger of God and he was very sorrowful. He started going early to the tops of the mountains to throw himself down from them. But whenever he reached the summit Gabriel would appear to him and say, Thou art the Prophet of God. At that his restlessness would cease and his self would return to him.

'The Prophet used to speak about that. He said, While I was walking one day I saw the angel who used to come to me at Hira, on a throne between heaven and earth. I was stricken with fear of him.'¹

Here again is the twofold vision of the earlier prophets; in the physical and the 'upper' worlds. In both the approach of Divine being strikes terror in the Semitic fundamental affirmation of transcendence, whether that being is called 'the Truth' or 'Gabriel' or 'Angels'.

¹ Quoted in W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953), pp. 40 ff.

But 'the heart did not falsify what it saw'. He brought among the nomads the beauty of moral law.

The Muslim philosophers of the Middle Ages have constructed round the figure of their prophet, who embodied for them the fulfilment of the prophetic conception, a profound synthesis of the nature of prophecy. The fact that it is built on a neo-Platonic substructure does not make their declaration less lucid, because this aspect of Platonism accords intellectually, as we shall see, with the human and angelic aspects of Zoroastrian and Semitic other-world experience, however much it differs regarding the relationship of God to man.

But they were careful to keep the Islamic ideal intact. Ibn Taymiya made clear the distinction between 'the cognitive approach to reality of the Greeks, and the position of the Koran, whose goal is neither contemplation nor the mystic love of God (for each leads to the heresy of unity of being and the identity of the world with God), but the active concept of knowledge of God's will. Only recognition of such allegiance could be described as monotheism.'¹ Al-Farabi speaks of a hierarchy of intelligible forms in a process which resembles an ascension, but 'My master Aristotle reported his master Plato as saying that the peak of knowledge is too high for any bird to reach.'² Beyond that comes the prophet's revelation, where truth is God's command, as it is in Judaism.

In this Avicenna recognizes the two phases of communication with which we have become familiar: 'Angels have an absolute being, but also a being relative to man. Their real existence is in the transcendent realm and is contacted only by holy human spirits. When the two meet, both senses of the human creature, internal and external, are attracted upwards, and the angel is presented to them in accordance with the power of the man, who sees the angel in a relative form. He hears the Angel's speech as a voice, even though it is intrinsically a spiritual communication.'

¹ Quoted in F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (1958), chap. 'Philosophy and Orthodoxy'.³

² Ibid. p. 63.

³ From *Tis' Rasā'il*, p. 66, 12. 67. 10. Rahman, op. cit., p. 74.

Al-Ghazali, finally, calls prophecy a divine gift not to be acquired by effort, but resting on divine grace.¹ He recognizes, however, a kind of identity between prophet and messenger at the moment of revelation, and so hovers on the edge of Sufism, which, arising from the heart of Islam, stood in unorthodox reaction to its stark transcendence. Mohammed becomes 'not only the last of the Prophets in time, but the first in eternity'. Just as the Northern Buddhists had transformed Buddha, the human conqueror of ignorance, into the source of the universe, so the Sufis transformed their Prophet, who had so strongly denied that God could be incarnate, into the uncreated Lord, the unknown God's manifestation in man. Here the boundary is crossed which divides religion from religion. The Persian poets have stepped into the metaphysical region of the Sages, and beyond them into the symbolic region of the Redeemers.

¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

The Philosophers

'Mindful in Me, their life hidden in Me, illuminating each other . . . the wise are content and joyful.'¹

PYTHAGORAS in the sixth century B.C. seems to have been the first to use the term *philosophia* in the sense of desire for wisdom, as a bloodless sacrifice of the senses in the discipline of thought. The method he employed was *theoria*: the imaginative reason. He was making systematic a series of endeavours by his predecessors in Ionia and the Greek colonies of southern Italy, to discover a basis of unity behind appearances, by the unfolding of numerical order within the richness of forms of a physical world not yet distinguished as material.

In India this discipline arose by gradual stages, still historically apparent, out of the sacrificial ritual of the Vedas, in the burning desire for the realization of identity between the Self and God.

Limitation of the Intellectual Life

It is noteworthy that every religious philosopher, East and West, while regarding ignorance as the root of all evil, considered this intellectual exercise as a means only, to train the mind for that moment when it takes a leap beyond itself. Plato's famous exposition of the service rendered by the exploratory mind in bringing teacher and pupil into *rappor*t, until a sudden flash of light communicated between them gives entry to a state which, he says, he

¹ Bhagavad Gita, VIII.

will never describe in writing,¹ is as explicit on this point as the Tibetan 'ear-whispered' teaching of 'Going Beyond' the reach of the intellect. This uses as illustration the Buddha's parable of the raft, which after it has floated the traveller across to the river-bank, must then be discarded as an encumbrance.²

'And as consummation to cling to unobstructed spontaneity,' sings Milarepa.³

'The country which is nowhere is the real home' is a saying ascribed to Lu Tzu.

This discarding, prepared, however, by hard mental discipline, is well known as a fundamental principle of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism in the Far East. It already appears in the Upanishads:

'Beloved! Logic brings no man the Self. Yet when a wise man shows him, he is found. Your longing eyes are turned towards reality. I think, Nachitas, your gates of joy are opened.'⁴

Its exploratory character

The second distinguishing characteristic of philosophic religion is the absence of those dogmas which are essential to prophecy. That depends, as we saw, on categorical statements of discovery, to be expanded in the Law and expressed in the Book.

The prophets and redeemers speak with the certainty of direct intercourse. Jesus says, 'Believe'.

But Buddha says, 'Doubt', because philosophic truth can only be relative, and the mind must be kept in flux in order to allow for growth. This reverses the prophetic attitude of Judaism and Islam, which depends on faith.

Platonism too has this vital fluidity, and so remains potent in Western thought. Nagarjuna, one of the great founders of Mahayana Buddhism, developed the Middle Way because Yes and No are relative to each other.⁵ This was an incitement to research like the

¹ Epistle, VII, 340-344. There is the same theme in *Phaedrus*, 275d. to 278d.

² A. David-Neel and Lama Yongden, *The Secret Oral Teaching of the Buddhist Sects* (1959), ch. VIII.

³ Sir Humphrey Clark, *The Message of Milarepa* (1959).

⁴ W. B. Yeats and Sri Purohit Swami, *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937).

⁵ *Madhyamika Karikas*.

probing of Socrates, who shows himself as philosopher rather than as prophet when he declares that he knows nothing.

The Philosophic religions, then, are concerned with the *relations* between the worlds of appearance and reality; not with ultimates. Those are the goal of faith.

Thus the Hindu Upanishads have come down to us not as a system, but as a collection of psychological discoveries moving towards the identification of the self with God, arising out of the pure poetry of the Vedas. The Buddhist scriptures are full of apparent contradictions, according to the level at which a problem is put forward.¹ No more do the dialogues of Plato aim at consistency. They are a series of experiments, dramatic like the *Hermetica* and the *Bhagavad Gita*; transposing the mind's internal warfare into arguments between characters, in which a whole city may be constructed to exemplify the workings of the human soul as in the *Republic*, or even a whole universe, as in the *Timaeus*. Plato's plunge into myth is itself an example of this fluidity, to be understood by each reader according to the quality of his imagination. He calls myth the 'noble lie' which allows for stages of growth in the history of every human mind, and tempers it to the reception of truth, to new conceptions of divinity, as is clearly shown in this passage of 'The Laws':

Athenian stranger: 'The true city should be named after God, who rules over men of understanding.'

Cleinias: 'But who is this God?'

Athenian stranger: 'To answer that it is necessary to make use of myth.'²

Its relation to orthodox religion

In the very regions where polytheism had engendered a peculiarly rich poetry and sculpture, philosophy was born; in India to assuage the tumultuous teeming of life, in Greece to direct the preoccupation with forms. Among the thinkers of both peoples, the Gods of their

¹ G. Tuck, *East and West* (Jan. 1957). 'This man (the Buddha) says no to everything, because he has found something above everything.'

² Plato, *The Laws*, X, 713A.

polytheistic youth had vanished except as abstractions; in the Hindu case into a fervid uncompromising monism. In early Buddhist as in contemporary Greek metaphysics the deities of popular belief are no longer the agents of action. The philosophers of East and West alike dared to conceive of the soul in a conditioned isolation from its multiple Gods, and the undying pantheism of the older races whom they had displaced, seems to have contributed towards their several conceptions of unity.¹

In the later Hindu religions of devotion, and in the various developments of Mahayana Buddhism (which seem to have arisen in some contact not only with Zoroaster's Messianic vision, but with syncretic Hellenism also),² the saviour Gods evoked by faith worked the redemption of great peoples throughout Central Asia and the Far East, while the vitality of Christendom was re-creating the whole European world. All these higher religions of modern times, together with the Sufic alchemy of Islam, were developed within philosophic systems even where they opposed them. The consequent richness of this impact was unprecedented in known history.

The search for Unity

Though Eastern and Western metaphysics began from opposite standpoints, the Greek from cosmic, the Indian from psychic, research, the soul's pilgrimage became the subject-matter of both. They were strangely alike in the symbolism of experience which can only be described in myth. This reappears as a setting and basis for the experience of individual mystics to our own time.

Both sides considered man to be the prisoner of his senses and lower mind, involved in action through a psychic gravitation, as Plato defines it in 'The Laws'.³ resembling the *karma*: the structure

¹ See G. R. Levy, *The Gate of Horn* (1948), Part IV, ch. II, and *The Sword from the Rock* (1953), Part I, ch. II.

² A. Gatty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (1928), ch. XXI.

A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (1957), pl. VI.

W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (1951).

Existing inscriptions on King Asoka's pillars, erected in the third century B.C., refer to Buddhist missionaries sent to the eastern Mediterranean.

³ Plato, for instance, *ibid.*, 904 C.

of activity which supports man's relation to God, for instance, in the Sankhya philosophy defined in the Bhagavad Gita. Both sides believed in the need for liberation through enlightenment. This, the recurring theme of Socrates, is most passionately stressed in the original form of Buddhism, but its gradual stages had already been scientifically developed in all the religions born of Hinduism. These stages are shown as transformations into progressive conditions of being; enlargements of consciousness through inner deaths and rebirths, such as appear to have existed in some form in the primitive initiation ceremonies of most early communities throughout the world, and to be lived through in all mystic experience.¹

Accounts of such stages have come down to us in the cosmic records of Mithraic ritual and the Hermetica, and there may well have been spiritual contacts in the age of syncretism inaugurated in the dream of Alexander, and made actual within the Roman Empire. About the period, at least, when their influence became important in the Roman world, the Buddhist painters of Gandhara, to the North of India, where temporary Greek occupation had left its mark in the portrayal of the human form, began to place in the diadems of their higher saints the transcendent divine images of aspiration.² But from fragmentary accounts that survive it appears that such a graded spiritual education may have also existed for a long time and much farther West, in the various Mysteries of Europe and Western Asia, from which some Greek poets and philosophers drew material for their symbolism of participation in non-physical existence.

The place of Egypt lies somewhat apart. Only the deep respect of classical writers and the attribution to her in the age of syncretism of a basic wisdom, may give evidence of a lost germinal revelation which could be compared with that of India. Yet there are hints in the conflicting remains of the art and literature of Egypt, of an early and unique mythical recognition of cosmic and psychological

¹ See for instance J. Layard, *The Stone Men of Malekula* (Vao, 1942).

² G. Roerich, *Tibetan Paintings* (1925), p. 36, and note 2, quoting A. Foucher *L'Art gréco-bouddhique de Gandhara*, II, i, pp. 333-6. For further details see p. 125.

relationships. In the absence of any complete metaphysical system, the other-world transformations of the soul are not infrequently depicted in this manner. The word 'soul' is used here for lack of another, though there is as little evidence in Egypt of belief in a single psychical entity, as there is in the religious literature of Tibet. The transformations are always represented as after-death experiences, and there is never a suggestion (in spite of Herodotus) of a return to the physical world.

But while the fall of the soul into generation and its remounting to a divine source, is the subject of the whole series of myths in which Plato takes his plunge beyond dialectic, and which he derives from unnamed 'men and women',¹ the Upanishads, as nearly as possible free from incidental myth, describe a journey in which the greater and lesser divinities of Nature share only as illusions of passage to the realization of the Supreme Self.

During the future Buddha's struggle with Mara, the Gods also leave him, but they return after his victory. The contemplation of Nature dawns again after withdrawal, for the enlightened sages of China. In Plato's myth of the *Phaedrus* the unborn souls behold, beyond the pathways of the Gods, the world of abstract ideas in beauty but not yet in wisdom, since they must still return to earth. In his *Symposium* earthly beauty is made a ladder for the soul's transformations, and Plotinus has recognized in this the redemption of matter. Love is the means of this realization, but love expanding through each phase of enlightenment towards an unseen wisdom 'beyond' with which it is inextricably united.

- In Vaishnava Hinduism as expressed, for instance, by the figure of Krishna, and in some sects of Far Eastern Mahayana, it even opened a way to salvation by devotion alone.

The Sufic philosophy of mediaeval Islam, built on Platonism, combines the processes of attainment in its distinction between *stations* of the way, which are the result of personal endeavour, and

¹ For instance, Plato, *Meno* 80 D-81 E: 'I have heard from men and women who are wise about these matters'—and 'those priests and priestesses whose continual study it is'.

states, which depend on God. The transition from station to state is by *gnosis* or knowledge in the heart. It is followed by love for God.

What, then, makes this journey, whether in refusal or in affirmation, of the phenomenal world? Can the conflicting discoveries in religious philosophy of the 'soul's' nature show a reconciliation between them? Such questions can only be answered in the 'beyond', and are therefore the subject of myth and the object of ritual.

The Soul's Journey

The cyclic rhythm of the universe of which this is the microcosmic repetition, as the atom enacts within itself the movement of planetary bodies round the sun, has been grandly described in the poetry of Hinduism:

'Those who know the day of Brahma . . . and the night . . . they know day and night.

'This multitude of beings, going forth repeatedly, is dissolved at the coming of night: it streams forth at the coming of day.

'Therefore there exists, higher than that unmanifested, another unmanifested, eternal, which in destroying all beings is not destroyed. . . . That is My supreme abode.

'Light and darkness; these are thought to be the world's everlasting paths; by the one he goes who does not return, by the other he who returns again.'¹

In such an environment the ordinary man's picture of re-incarnation appears too simple, because the soul cannot be thought of in separation from all others (Plato's 'All-Soul') and its own past. Within the artifice of time the soul still possesses recollection, which, as we saw earlier, is the gathering of the past into the present, rather than mere memory, which is a backward movement.

The Buddha's doctrine of the negation of the ego is a fundamen-

¹ Bhagavad Gita, VIII, pp. 17-26.

tal concept which seems to separate it from orthodox Hindu religion. The chain of interdependent origins, unprogressive in time, is mentioned already in his first sermon. It is that world of flux in which Heraclitus found his stability. The Buddha's teaching is quite explicit: 'What, is it this same name-and-form that is reborn?' 'No, but by this name-and-form deeds are done, and by these deeds another name-and-form is born.'¹ 'Fortified, clarified in mind, the Bikkhu now directs his mind towards the recollection and recognition of previous modes of existence. Then he recalls the epochs of many a world-arising, then the epochs of many a world-destruction.' What the enlightened man recovers is far beyond individual lives.

It is this recollection (*anamnesis*) which Plato makes the instrument of spiritual progress in his myths of the soul's passage between the worlds, and they in turn rest in some such body of faith as that one whose tenets have come down to us inscribed in gold tablets from certain graves of southern Italy and Attica. These have the function of a passport, proclaiming the discarnate soul as already a countryman of the enfranchized: 'I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven, but my origin is of Heaven itself.' It affirms that the soul must drink of the Lake of Mnemosyne: that personification of Memory who was mother of the nine Muses.

'For I too declare myself to be of your blessed race.' Who is it that remembers? In the myth of the *Phaedrus* the soul-charioteer has been granted the vision of divine forms beyond the heaven-world, but falls beneath the double load of forgetfulness and disorder. It is a composite entity, as it is in the *Katha Upanishad* which uses the same symbol: 'Self indeed rides the chariot of the body, intellect the firm-footed charioteer, discursive mind the reins.'²

In the *Timaeus* only the divine seed is set upon the wheel of lives, to return through the cosmic spheres, unfolded by the colour

¹ *The Questions of King Milinda*. Trans. T. W. Rhys-Davids.

² W. B. Yeats and Purohit Swami, op. cit., The whole of the Bhagavad Gita is based on the same symbol.

and sound of each, to its source in God. The journey is seen as the very process of creation, and Plato here uses the same metaphor of the reversed tree, which the *Katha Upanishad* describes: 'Eternal creation is a tree, with roots above, branches below', the banyan tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment; a species which could not have been known from observation by an Athenian. 'Its leaves are hymns' sings the Bhagavad Gita.

For Greek and Hindu alike the traveller descends to a prison, a 'roofed-in cave', a tomb; the ignominy of the flesh in the web of illusion. This is the fallen divinity in each man, described by Empedocles as an exile and a wanderer.

Hermes Trismegistos shows the descent as a fall of the immortal from grace: 'The sole Ruler said to the souls: You know that so long as you were sinless you dwelt in the places nigh to Heaven, but now that blame has come upon you, you have been condemned to imprisonment in the organs of mortal bodies . . . I myself will keep watch on you, and if the charges against you are slight, you shall be released from the deadly bondage of the flesh, and freed from sorrow shall greet your home again.'¹

But Philo of Alexandria, heir like the compiler of the *Hermetica* to the Platonic tradition, possibly sees the descent as dependent on individual choice. He thus places the elect souls:

'Therefore all that are wise like Moses are living abroad from their home. For the souls of such formerly chose their expatriation from Heaven, and call that heavenly region in which they have their citizenship, fatherland, but this earth in which they live, foreign.'²

These choosers of an earthly mission call to mind the Bodhisattvas of Mahayana doctrine, which had taken shape in the same general epoch.³

Origen brought this Greek inheritance within the embrace of

¹ *Thrice Greatest Hermes*. Trans. G. R. S. Mead.

² Philo Judaeus, p. 416, ch. XVII. Unfortunately the vital word *formerly* is damaged in the surviving text. Some scholars have restored it to mean *never*, and if so this is not an instance of choice but a colonization, reluctantly undertaken, like that of the souls in the *Timaeus*, at God's command.

³ But see previous note.

Christian philosophy, from which it was later expelled. He speaks of a universal destiny and his words have a strangely Indian sound: 'Every soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories and weakened by the defects, of its previous life. Its work in this world determines its place in the world which is to follow. . . . The hope of freedom is entertained by the whole of creation . . . when the Sons of God who either fell away or were scattered abroad shall be gathered together into one, and when they shall have fulfilled their duties in this world.' These are 'those who in order to serve the whole world were brought down from those higher and invisible spheres to these lower and visible ones *against their will*.¹ So these are not the Bodhisattvas. Nevertheless, like the descending spirits of Philo and Zoroaster their fall is ordained to serve God's purpose of salvation.

Clement too expresses a Christian conception not yet fully differentiated from the *Timaeus*. 'We were in being long before the foundation of the world. Therefore we have existed from the beginning. . . . Not for the first time does He show pity on us in our wanderings. He pitied us from the very beginning.'² Here is no specific distinction of an atomic individuality. It is Plato's 'All-soul'.³

The cyclic journey described in Greek and Farther Eastern religious philosophy was thrust aside in the Judaeo-Zoroastrian emphasis on life's historic drama, but the transmutations of the multiple soul were carried by way of St. Augustine and Dionysius into the philosophic vision of St. Thomas Aquinas.⁴ Following Dionysius also, St. Thomas shows the human soul as moving upwards in the companionship and with the aid of saints and angels who act as intermediaries. These too had entered the metamorphosis of philosophy out of a remote past. Already among the poets Hesiod had seen the souls of dead heroes, themselves the sons of Gods, as remaining in contact with the earth in order to help

¹ Origen, *De Principiis*.

² Clement, *Exhortation to the Pagans*.

³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, pp. 245 c.

⁴ St. Thomas, *De Div. Nom.*, C.7.1.4.

fallen Mankind, now entered into the Iron Age.¹ This contact was maintained in historical times by the devotion of the living, expressed in rites to promote earth's fertility. These again had very distant beginnings, among the totemic ancestors of primitive peoples everywhere, who were thought to have descended from the sky to guide their human children. Already in such societies a boy becomes a man only when brought into participation with the divine life through the enactment of a death and rebirth, and the experience gained is his passport to the world beyond death. So the fall of the soul into generation and its return by the recollection or realization of its origin, as symbolized in all religious philosophy, has received its formal shaping in earliest myth, while reaching forward to the exalted prototypes of our redemption.

¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, pp. 121 ff.

The Redeemers

IN THE HINDU EPIC of the Mahabharata, on the field of Kurukshetra, which has become for later ages, like Ilion, the typical battleground of human life, the supreme God appears symbolically as the hero's charioteer, in that warfare which, like all warfare, is between kinsmen. He says to him: 'Whenever there is decay of the Law, O Bharata, and exaltation of lawlessness, then I myself come forth. I am born from age to age. He who knows My divine origin comes to Me.'¹

He also says: 'However men approach Me, so do I welcome them, for the path men take on every side is Mine.'²

These tremendous words have their source in the cosmic conception of 'the Days and Nights of Brahma'; the rhythm of Creation and its return to the unmanifested, thought of in terms of human time. They are made further explicit by Shankaracharya: 'There is one form of the highest God which is eternally redeemed, taking back into itself the created. As long as there is contrast between seen and unseen, the Brahman (unmanifest God) must be seen as Ishvara (manifest).'³

In this cosmic vision Redemption is present throughout the existence of a universe. It follows that Becoming itself is of the nature of sacrifice, that Nature, which has given the beauty of form

¹ Bhagavad Gita, IV, p. 7.

² Id. IV, 11.

³ Shankaracharya, quoted by R. Otto *East and West* (1932), ch. X. 8.

to the outbreathings of Creation, is illusory only when seen as separately existing, and must, in the artifice of time, be again withdrawn. Or, as Blake puts it: 'All things are comprehended in these eternal forms in the Divine Body of the Saviour.'

The outgoing and return of manifestation are also present for the West in one of the myths in which Plato clothes his visions of universal passage through life and death.¹ For a certain time God himself helps to guide and propel the world. When the cycles have accomplished their measure he lets go. The universe then moves in a contrary direction, because it is a living creature who has understanding from its Creator, and to be constant in the same state belongs only to the most divine of all.

In the withdrawal of divinity from manifestation, the lesser Gods, his Angels (daimones) leave their active participation in the physical world, in order, it is implied, that man may develop free will. In the ensuing degeneration, just as in the Mahabharata, it is found necessary to send heavenly guides, assigning living creatures to the Angels as flocks to divine shepherds. 'So God in His loving kindness set over us a race more excellent than ourselves, to their own great content and ours.' Through them, he says, we learn to take care of ourselves.

Such are the heavenly teachers of order out of confusion. Elsewhere Plato describes in allegory the fate of the human saviour who has struggled to the light and must return (like his own teacher Socrates) to the dark prison where his companions sit chained, absorbed in the shadows cast upon their walls by the unknown sun, to drag them into the daylight.²

These, then, are the two aspects of the Saviour: the God who descends into incarnation, whether once or periodically, but (since it is a God) for all time also, and the human being who by inconceivable labour has outstripped his fellows and reached the light, only to turn back by choice to the world of ignorance and illusion until everything alive shall have found deliverance.

¹ Plato, *Politicus* 268E to 274E.

² Id. *Rep.* 514-515.

This is the sublime conception of the Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism, in whom

‘ . . . A whole life time’s death in love
Ardour & selflessness & self-surrender,’¹

is carried through uncounted lifetimes and all that may lie between. These are conceived to have taken the tremendous vow:

‘I will experience in all the states of woe found in any world-system, all the abodes of suffering. I must not cheat any living being out of my store of merit. I am resolved to remain in each state of sorrow for innumerable aeons. So I will help all beings to freedom in any world.’²

Thus the task of salvation includes ‘the harrowing of hell’, and there the Tibetan and Sikkimese paintings of the Wheel of Life usually show the figure of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara erect beside the awful form of the God of Death. The comprehension of that task finds many illustrations in the extant tales of the Buddha’s previous lives—‘in all the earth there is not one spot, even of the size of a mustard seed, where he has not surrendered his body for the sake of living creatures.’³

Here is the Indian Avatar, he who treads in the footsteps of his predecessors; the Tathagata of whom the historic Gautama was only a single emanation: ‘I walk so that the kingdom of unsurpassed cognition is built up of all beings.’⁴

But the cosmic Amitabha, the Buddha of boundless light, is portrayed in early Chinese art as the centre of perspectives which stretch to invisible horizons, and surrounded by a concourse of Bodhisattvas who are his links with mortal sorrow and sin.

It cannot escape notice that the vow of repetition of sacrifice aligns the returning Bodhisattva with those beings manifested in

¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages*.

² Quoted by E. A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (1955), pp. 133-4, taken from various sutras.

³ Translation of Lafcadio Hearn, *Kokoro*, p. 167.

⁴ *Lotus Sutra*.

myth from long before recorded history, who died and lived again with seasonal change: 'The Son of God is born in every furrow.'

Those were the divine redeemers, inseparable from the rhythm of time. 'It is the nature of what is high to impart itself to what is lower'¹—the law of all immanence.

For in primitive religions this sacrifice of divinity was not so much a choice as a natural law, since choice was not yet distinguished from Law. To judge by the beliefs of nearly all modern hunting peoples, as well as by the still potent awe which is a stylistic feature of palaeolithic cave paintings, the animals of the chase were believed to give their lives willingly, in support of life, and hunter and worshipper were one.

So when the sacrifice upon which continuance depended was seen in cosmic proportions after the birth of nations, and the Vedic archetypal Man was quartered, and the Babylonian Kingu died so that his blood might be mixed with man's clay,² an animal out of the past was sometimes retained as its symbol—the Mithraic Bull, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. There was present from the beginning that reciprocity required to produce the Saviour who is to be called into incarnation by prayer and needs.

The Hindu Vedas, built upon the ritual of sacrifice, say that life exists by offering itself to itself, since food is the disguised God. So the discarnate Pharaoh of the Pyramid inscriptions must devour the Gods themselves before entering into divinity.

So in the central act of the related Iranian liturgy of communion, the Haoma as plant is victim, crushed for its juice, and as God it is priest, and offered as priest-victim to God in Heaven. The worshipper drinks it as a foretaste of immortality.³

Such communion seems to have reached Greece in the rites of the child Dionysus, who as Zagreus was devoured by the ancestors of man that the divine spark in each might become his inheritance.

¹ Proclus, *Theology of Plato*, VI. 4.

² 'The Epic of Creation.' See G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock* (1953), pp. 58 and 114.

³ R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi* (1956), ch. XII.

So we look forward to its latest, most potent manifestation, 'Take, eat, for this is my body'.

So in the world of myth and ritual all living things are thought to share the sacrifice of the divine saviours, and thus offer the material for their own redemption, and some vision of this reciprocity is apparent from the beginning of time.

The divinities of growth and decay in seasonal procession became, as we know, symbolic figures of immortality. With the rise of the great states of the Middle East the kings who embodied or represented the lost God (brought back from the dead after loving search by wife or mother), either in his own person or that of his son, periodically renewed in ritual recurrence the life of the land. In the process of return an Adversary had to be met and defeated, Seth against Horus, Tiamat and her son against Marduk.¹ We have encountered that Adversary in Iran, where mankind was ranged as an army to aid the Divine Wisdom in aeonian warfare, and the Dragon of the Apocalypse has inherited from Babylon his cyclic alternation of freedom and bondage. Christ and Buddha overcome him by the pure weight of love and wisdom, but the epics of India (whose philosophy nevertheless disclaims the reality of such embattled opposition), give unique expression to its ever-mysterious source; to the kinship, in fact, of Avatar and Adversary.

This is of the first importance, explaining or at least illustrating the attitude of all saviours, whether human or divine, to the betrayer who makes possible their ultimate victory. The prologue to the Ramayana shows the position from the Enemy's standpoint. A crisis has to be precipitated before the world can accept a Redeemer. Good and Evil, it seems, usually so inextricably mingled in human life, are now separated into opposing tensions that the Good may offer its strength inviolate. So the Adversary's task is to rouse the world through suffering to call for an Avatar, for free will remains the law of mankind; which, like the Zoroastrian humanity, must be ranged with the light, lest a trust be betrayed.

The demonic Ravan, who takes incarnation in the Ramayana

¹ See previous page, note 2.

that Vishnu may be born as Rama to oppose him, is shown as spiritually the devotee of Vishnu, and his violence against the wife of Rama is deliberately undertaken to precipitate the warfare which exterminates himself and the whole race of demons.¹

The fall of Christ's Adversary comes through pride at the inauguration of a world-age, pride being, as the prophets knew, the most poignant of all snares for the human soul, symbolically reflected in the cosmos. So the Greek mythmakers of the wars of Gods and Giants, which took place at the beginning of their cycle, showed *hubris* or insolence as the cause of disorder and mankind's perpetual danger after the Golden Age. Pride is the cosmic evil because it means separation from both immanent and transcendent unity. It makes man's free will a travesty by giving a false sense of freedom and so breaks the harmony of the world order. The decay of the Law is in progress when 'I Myself come forth'.

So the punishment of Pride's embodiment is imprisonment and bondage, whether he is Kingu or Satan or Ahriman. Dante shows him constrained by the whole weight of the universe.²

But that takes place at the end of a cycle, in the Messianic victory. In the drama of the greater and lesser redeemers, of the saints and sages who rehearse it, as well as the Saviours who fulfil, the tragic hero encourages his antagonist—Jesus says to Judas, 'What thou has to do, do quickly'; Socrates declines the offer of alternatives to the death penalty; the Tibetan Milarepa accepts the poison offered by the envious lama, knowing that it will lead him to repentance.³ 'The protagonists in such a drama are always friends behind the scenes.'⁴

Therefore Jesus as Divine Redeemer could utter the command 'Love your enemies', and Gautama as human saviour raised to the highest, could proclaim: 'Hatred ceases only by love. This is an eternal law.'⁵

¹ A. Besant, *Avatars*, *passim*.

² Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIV.

³ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (1928), pp. 247-50.

⁴ A. K. Coomaraswamy.

⁵ *Dhammapada*, 5.

In the religions of wisdom, where the battle is scarcely externalized, a gradual succession of transformations lifts the soul from its obsessions. This too has its mythical formula in the hero who takes the attributes of the defeated, as Heracles wears the lion's skin. But his final robe, the poisoned shirt of the half-animal Centaur, which drove him, another Phoenix (as the Phoenician character of the rite reveals),¹ to rise to Olympus from the self-kindled pyre, was recognized by later ages as the clinging bondage of sense.

Similarly the Mexican antagonist Tezcatlipoca, the magician who struggles with the saviour God Quetzalcoatl at the cross-points of the compass, is said not to have been the personification of Evil, but to represent the lures of the phenomenal world within man's heart, like the Buddhist Mara. Quetzalcoatl actually achieves his ascension after falling into carnality and drunkenness. Clothed in his bird-form this Phoenix sets fire to his body, and from the ashes his heart rises to the skies.²

He had rescued mankind from barbarism with the gift of maize, as Prometheus ransomed an earlier race with the civilizing fire, and was chained in consequence through a world-age before his alignment could be completed with its Ruler.

Such are the lesser saviours. Only Hinduism and Christianity saw the supreme God Himself as incarnate for our ransom. Where the event is regarded as single, it must hold past and future in its embrace, for 'only what serves to redeem the whole can redeem a single creature'.³

It is the fall of humanity that cries for the gift of redemption. In the Nahuatl myth, the fall and ascension take place in the same God-Man, as in the piercingly human fall of the Judaeo-Christian story,

¹ See G. R. Levy, 'The Oriental Origin of Heracles', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LIV (1934).

² *Annals of Cuauhtitlán*, in the Nahuatl. Codice Chimalpopoca, trans. into Spanish by Primo F. Velásquez 1945, translated from the Spanish by I. Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* (1958), p. 72.

³ Rodney Collin, *The Theory of Eternal Life* (1951).

'We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's Cross and Adam's Tree stood in one place.'¹

Adam as the Kabbalists knew him is androgyne (like Plato's primal humanity) until Eve is parted from his body in the sleep of his 'spirit's voluntary self-forgetting'² which inaugurates his mortality. This is the symbolic division of the Vedic Purusha, and of Marduk's fight with Tiamat which separated Heaven from Earth.

The Fall, then, is the subjection of the human soul to division, and in Judaeo-Christianity death and pain are imperfections arising from this state, as they are—greatly stressed—in Buddhism. But 'all creation had that most divine of properties, autonomy, because without it it would be incapable of love'. This is the Living Being of Plato's *Timaeus*. Apart from this the concept of individual freedom is meaningless.

Within that living unity it follows that only the holiest can recognize Satan. Hence the collusion in the Betrayal. From such a standpoint, conceivable only in myth, Lucifer represents the divine descent and Christ the divine ascension. Our mortal minds cannot recognize good without evil, and in looking backwards we lose ourselves, like Orpheus. For memory to be creative it must draw the past towards us. We do not go to meet it.

In the philosophic religions of the Indian and Hellenic worlds, the descent of man's soul into physical life constitutes the fall, and ransom is won by that very recollection and reconciliation of one's heavenly source: 'I am the Child of Earth and starry Heaven, but my origin is of Heaven itself.'³ In Mahayana Buddhism as in Augustinian Christianity, this is achieved by Grace:⁴ the unrelated Good that comes from above, through alignment with higher and highest existence.

In both the dramatic and the metaphysical portrayals, the Fall is

¹ John Donne, *Hymn to God, my God, in sickness*.

² See A. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*, chap. I, for a beautiful interpretation of the symbolism of the Fall.

³ From inscribed directions for the soul's journey found in various graves in Italy and Greece, presumably Orphic or Pythagorean.

⁴ Evans-Wentz, *op. cit.*, 9.282.

thus represented as division from unity: 'They parted My garments among them'; and redemption is the means of return: 'I walk so that the kingdom of unsurpassed cognition is built up of all beings'.

Thus the sacrifice of the Redeemers is the taking of bodily form, to work upon it as an artist rejoicing in his limitations. Our sacrifice is to aspire beyond form by absorbing their life, which entails the agonized destruction of loved appearances.

In the past our civilizations had to attain individuality like men, in the attempt to contribute their special form to the whole. Now it seems that behind the ideologies of exclusion which keep step with the shared unprecedented exploitation of nature, there is a recrudescence of attempts, in groups or individually, to remake the pathways towards or within the common spiritual life. The creators of religious thought in the West already knew this. St. Thomas declared: 'It is said that if anyone born in barbarous nations does what lies in him, God will reveal to him what is necessary for salvation, either by inspiration or by sending a teacher.'¹

So Augustine had once written:² 'The very matter that is now called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and it was with the human race from the beginning, to the time when Christ appeared in the flesh, from when on the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christian.' And St. Paul, speaking to the Athenians of the most central Mystery of all, 'In Him we live and move and have our being', adds: 'as certain of your own poets have said'.³

Frithjof Schuon⁴ has well illustrated this universality in uniqueness of the Redeemer from the Christian viewpoint: 'As there are many solar systems, so there are many suns, but this does not prevent each being unique by definition.' 'To state that Christ is not "the Son of God" but only "a Son of God" would thus be

¹ Quoted in the Temple Classics edition of Dante's *Paradiso*, p. 255.

² Augustine, *Retractations*, I, xiii. (afterwards withdrawn).

³ Acts xvii. 28.

⁴ F. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, trans. Peter Townsend (1953), pp. 98, 99.

false, for the Word is unique, and each of its manifestations essentially reflects its Divine unicity.' This seems to chime with Hindu and Mahayana conceptions.

If the past of the human individual is held to be redeemed in finding the saviour, so must world-history be capable of salvation, and the command to love one's neighbour, quoted by Jesus from the old Law, must be extended to the perished races whose efforts have set us where we are.

'Pity and love are man's because long stress
Moulded blind mass to form.'¹

The pieties of the ancestral hearth made a solidarity from which the daring few could spring to enlighten and to save, not without an inexpressibly tender collaboration, it seems, from above.

This assimilation of human endeavour, by what Tibetan Buddhism calls Hooks of Grace, in all stages with hidden waiting hosts, seems to offer the sole conceivable explanation of those efforts at contact now being made on what may be the very verge of our destruction. For however symbolic or idiosyncratic the form of communion, those beings hold a certainty in essence which calls to a growing certainty in the human soul: 'Cœtitude, Certitude, Sentiment, Joie, Paix'.²

In every grade of approach, rayed or ranged to the inconceivably High, They await our call for succour, to proffer the grace which multiplies itself in salvation.

For as Dionysius discovered: 'It is enough to recall that this first order gave to those below it, as befits angelic goodness, this teaching that the most august Deity should be proclaimed by the God-filled intelligences, for as the scriptures say, being in the likeness of God, they are divine habitations of the Divine stillness . . . for He holds the whole Universe superessentially in His irresistible embrace.

¹ Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, Book VIII.

² From the *Memorial of Pascal*, recording the two hours of divine communion which changed his life, and found sewn into the lining of his doublet after death.

'By moulding itself after their likeness, our own Hierarchy will be as far as possible assimilated to it, and will in very deed show forth as in images of angelic beauty, receiving its form from them, and being uplifted by them to the superessential Source of every Hierarchy.'¹

Here the human and divine Saviours embrace through the descent of the Holy Spirit, in the humility which unites ascent and descent. The few who live in it perpetually can impart it without speech, like Ramana Maharshi in recent years, radiating grace in silence day by day to his disciples of many nations.² Such men form, it may be, the physical advance guard of a whole order of Beings, like planets alive in the Sun's light, who await the mysterious summons to lay out the field of radiation for the one unperishable Essence from which all such manifestations periodically descend, and are transfigured, and return to the bosom of the Father, single but not alone.

¹ Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchies*.

² See, for instance, A. Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi* (1954), or Mouni Sadhu, *In Days of Great Peace* (1957).

PART IV

The Return Journey

The Redemption of Matter

RENUNCIATION OF THE WORLD, in all those great examples of lives considered above, which culminated in enlightenment, led back to the world again for its redemption. So the creative imagination takes new structures within the individual, in its changing relations with the physical world.

The subject of this book was earlier said to be the distinction between the formation of imagery in art, and its creation in religious experience. These were called two phases of a single activity, since the artist's image is always built in his mind before receiving its material expression, while the mystic, as we saw, draws from art the formal visualization of lives, or living forces, with which his soul makes contact.¹

The acceptance or rejection of images may equally be found to lead to a common goal. Nature is illusory only when regarded in multiplicity, but art has its source in the recognition of Nature in Law. That law is found to rest in the higher consciousness, since unity is perceived, but not yet known, to be its essence. The artist's recognition of natural law is spontaneous and urgent; its expression is always indirect, that is, symbolic, whether its aim is abstract or naturalistic. But a true work of art can never be confused with mere symbolism, being an individual evocation of life. Yet in so far as it is symbolic, it calls to something universal in the understanding, so that the most sophisticated may take pleasure in the palaeolithic communion with animal beauty, or the neolithic geometry of rhythm.

¹ See above, pp. 56, 57, for St. Teresa's dependence on the painter's image of Christ.

The symbolism of art is thus seen to be perfectly valid from its earliest examples, to express the discovery of a common truth which cannot be logically described.

We saw, in Chapter 3, that since form is a necessary condition of knowledge, the existences comprehended by the spiritual imagination may take on new forms even at the higher levels.¹ Since knowledge is there only valid in union, the images vanish when they have lost the perspective of duality, to re-form in new conditions, because life exists in movement. Beauty must be re-created from within itself, and Ritual, whose power rests on the interaction of all the arts, may thus open the way to the transcendence of its own forms, which are constant only in the material world. So matter may be redeemed in the movement of spirit within the process of art.

Among the peoples whose religious development we have just been considering, art was always a matter of tradition, that is, it expressed the whole body of spiritual achievement created by the religion, however much that expression might be kindled by individual genius. There can be traced in the architecture, sculpture and painting of the nations concerned, a traditional assimilation with cosmic creation as then understood in myth, and its reflection in the human body as vehicle of fate. It may be profitable to close our consideration of the soul's transformations with a glance at the methods by which each of the visual arts has left records of its recognition of immaterial form.

1. ARCHITECTURE

A. THE TOWER AS AXIAL MOUNTAIN

The earliest religious architecture in the group of ancient kingdoms whose remains have so far been made available for investigation, reveals a complex of three main features within a common en-

¹ See above, p. 41.

closure. They are a tower, a temple and a court. These have kept their relationship with new meanings down to the present day, in Moslem architecture and that of the Far East.

(a) *The Pyramid*

In the present state of archaeological discovery, the Tower is found to be earliest perfected, and reveals most clearly its pervading influence throughout the East. Extant texts show it, both in Egypt and Mesopotamia, whether as Pyramid or Ziggurat, to represent the Primaeval Mound or Sacred Mountain which rose above the Abyss of Waters at the creation of the world. Although this monument became the embodiment of spiritual ascent, it retained in both centres of civilization its contact with the underworld, and was physically or symbolically a tomb.

The hieroglyph of the Egyptian step pyramid, whose form is two converging stairways, seems to mean 'place of ascent', and the existing textual references to the Pyramids themselves, in their great final form tapering smoothly upwards on a square base, stress their relation with the sky.

But if the point of the emblematic Mountain was a focus for the sun's down-pouring rays, the pyramid texts also show the king's soul as moving upwards by those paths: 'I have trodden thy rays as a ramp under my feet, whereby I mount to my mother, the living uraeus on the brow of Re.'¹ So the point of the Pyramid, whose base (unlike the temple pyramids of Central America) contained a grave, was a meeting-place of ascent and descent for the deceased king, who was the fulcrum of the people's life. In later times any dead man might be represented in sculpture as seated on the Primaeval Hill.

(b) *The Ziggurat*

The city-states of Mesopotamia, the other greatly creative power of the Middle East during the third millennium B.C., also represented

¹ Translation of I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 234.

in architecture the sacred mountain which rose at creation above the waters of Chaos; the *Absu* which has given us the word 'abyss'. In its earliest form this was just a temple raised above the plain by a series of platforms, and was dedicated not to the sky-God but to the Earth-Mother, who was called Lady of the Mountain. But when in later centuries its platforms had become the stages of a tower, the chamber on its summit reached by great stairways visible to all was a place of communication between God and king. The Ziggurat was thus known in various city-states as the Bond between heaven and earth. Its name means high, and pointed.

But like the Egyptian pyramid, the staged tower, as we know it in Babylon from contemporary descriptions, was also thought to contain a tomb. During the annual New Year's Festival, when the king took upon himself the humiliations and splendours of the God Marduk, there was enacted the liberation of the deity from his mountain prison within the Ziggurat, after a search through the city by his mourning Goddess, in which all the people joined. Later the resurrected God in the king's person mounted the great stairways to the chapel on the summit. Even this structure bore only the name of 'antechamber'. Within it was consummated the sacred marriage for the renewal of the life of the land.

Though no Ziggurat remains on any city site to show all its seven stages, those levels that still rise are found in several cases to have been painted, each in a different colour, said by ancient writers to represent 'the image of the moving heavens', and specifically compared by them to the stages of ascent in the Mystery religions of Western Asia. 'The Mithraic ladder,' says Cumont, 'is reflected in the Ziggurat.'

Beside its vertical symbolism as bond between heaven and earth, there was also a horizontal bond in space, to judge by the description in Genesis of the Tower of Babel, which was raised 'lest we be dispersed on the face of the earth', and was destroyed by the confusion of tongues. It stood, therefore, even in alien eyes, for an orientation with world order, as well as the means of human

ascent between the worlds. A creation myth from Assur locates the first man at the 'Flesh-bond-place'.¹

The Ziggurat always retained the pyramidal shape of the Mountain, or its conical shape, like the only complete survival, which is now a minaret in the city of Samarra and possesses an outer spiral stairway like the one in Babylon described by Herodotus. Perhaps the memory of the *hubris* of the Tower of Babel induced Christian, like Moslem, architects to consecrate the tower of their sacred complex only to the call of God to man, but farther east the symbolism of the staged tower was reawakened after the fall of Babylon and Nineveh in

(c) *The Stupa*

This creation of Buddhist devotion was, like the Egyptian pyramid, the direct architectural embodiment of a symbol. At first set up in a number of places as a reliquary to hold the cremated relics of the Buddha's physical body, its square base represented the cavernous tomb of Earth overshadowed by the dome of Meru, the World Mountain. Above this rose a shining metal mast, the axis of the universe, whose tiers of discs represented the heavens of the Gods, 'a cosmographical heir of Western Asia'.²

For many centuries after the Buddha's parinirvana, until, in fact, the impact of Greek sculptural ideas fell upon India, he was represented in reliefs only by symbols. Religious scenes of human activity, carved on the Stupa gates, show his worshippers adoring the Tree of Enlightenment, the Wheel of the Law, the riderless horse of the escape from his kingdom. So the Stupa, constructed of bricks like the Vedic altar of sacrifice, took the place of his human form. In this manner the cosmic significance of the edifice was mingled with that of man's body, not only as a tomb but as a tabernacle of the

¹ There is a good summary of ancient records of the ziggurats in Father Burrows' article 'Some Cosmological Patterns in Babylonian religion', in S. Hooke, *The Labyrinth* (S.P.C.K., 1935). The most comprehensive account of their architecture is A. Parrot, *Ziggurats et le Tour de Babel* (Paris 1949).

² There is a well-illustrated account of the Indian Stupa in B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India* (Pelican History of Art 1953).

soul in its transformations. Its gates, at the four cardinal points of the compass, formed angles 'like the revolving claws of the swastika', its stairways, like those of the ziggurat, were made for circumambulation in ascent.

From its birthplace the Stupa spread, with formal modifications, over the whole of Buddhist Asia, whether as the dagoba of Ceylon, or the Siamese chetiyas whose superimposed spheres bring them near to the Pagoda. The actual temple architecture of South-East Asia shows stylistic memories of its elements.

(d) *The Chörten*

Its most perfect legacy, and the most explicit in symbolism, is probably the Tibetan and Mongolian Chörten, the purity of whose stone proportions may dominate a whole mountain landscape to denote the approach to sacred territory. It may stand sixty feet high, and be itself a passage-way for pilgrims like the Western Gate of Lhasa. It may even lend its distinctive meaning to a whole temple-complex, as in the Kumbum at Gyantse, 'a reasoned synthesis of the Buddhist Universe'.

Being first a tomb or reliquary, the Chörten formerly symbolizes the five elements to be passed through after death. Its cubical base represents both solid earth and the earthly element. Above it is the water-drop and the element water. The long triangular spire with its tiers of ascension developed from the mast of the Indian Stupa, means flame, and the element fire. This leads upwards to the inverted crescent of the sky, and the element air. Lastly comes the sphere tapering to a flame; the element ether.¹ The superstructures are usually overlaid with gold leaf to represent another aspect of life, shown in metal above the Stupa. They are said to point the way through the thirteen Bodhisattva heavens to the existence beyond Nature.

The connection of this structure is made clear in the story of Milarepa's painful labours, at his teacher's command, to build and

¹ This is admirably shown by the diagram on p. 269 of W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (1928).

destroy in turn four houses. The plan of the first is described as circular; that of the second a semicircle; of the third a triangle, of the fourth a square. This reversal of the order of geometric elements in the Chörten, shows that the work was not to be regarded as mere penance for Milarepa's former deeds of evil magic, but as the undoing of previous actions down to their foundations, before reconstructing them into a spiritual edifice.

In general, the likeness of the Chörten to the human figure in its spiritual history is such a close one, that Chörtens surrounded by haloes often alternate with, or even replace, the seated forms of divinities on painted banners or the borders of manuscripts.¹

The Kumbum at Gyantse, which an inscription calls 'the absolute body of the Tathagata', is a cluster of 100 chapels, forming on the fourth storey an upright mandala, rising 'like a fugue' to its summit, where in a dark cell surrounded by invisible paintings, is the statue of Dorje-Chang as supreme principle of the manifested universe.²

The union of male and female powers, which took place on the apex of the Mesopotamian Ziggurat on behalf of all, is here symbolized in the lowest chamber, as the fusion of method and wisdom. This chamber is called the Lotus Throne of Dorje-Chang.

(e) *The Pagoda*

In China the Tower became part of a sacred complex like the Ziggurat, minaret and steeple. The Taoist t'ai had been built for 'communication with Heaven', and adorned with paintings of 'Heaven, Earth, & Supreme Unity'. In the Buddhist era the tower, *ssü*, became itself the name for temple or monastery.

It was formally close to the Indian Stupa only at its heavenly level, that is in its crowning mast fitted with tiers of bronze discs. Its architectural predecessor was the many-storied tower which

¹ There is a good example in Marco Pallis' *The Way and the Mountain* (1960), facing p. 134.

² There is an account in F. Maraini, *Secret Tibet* (1954), based on G. Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica*, vol. ix, 1. Lama Govinda describes its symbolism in *The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (1959), pp. 185-6. Both of these have fine illustrations.

had been made famous in northern India by the westernized builders of Kushan, who no doubt remembered the Ziggurat. In the sixth century of our era Sung Yün saw Kanishka's tower of thirteen wooden stories and an iron mast with thirteen golden discs.¹

This conception travelled through Central Asia to reach China in the time of its glory. During the T'ang dynasty, though regarded as a repository for relics, manuscripts and sacred images, it was sometimes built to be a tomb. The bones of the pilgrim Hiouen Tsang, which he wished to be buried under a simple mat beside a river, received such a monument, which still stands.

The Pagoda, too, symbolized the World-Mountain, bond between heaven and earth. An early document speaks of its crowning tiers of discs as representing spheres of the skies. The Emperor's brocaded robe, worn until modern times in the ritual of communion with Heaven, always bore as its central design a Mountain. This can be seen, in Marco Pallis' illustration to 'The Way and the Mountain', and elsewhere, to take the actual form of a Pagoda, risen out of the tossing waters of chaos towards the sky.² Here, as long before upon the Ziggurat, the world-axis is a ceremonial link between human and divine.

B. THE BODY OF THE TEMPLE

All these towers, then, sometimes related to each other in linear succession, had symbolic reference to the creation of world-order out of chaos, first made architecturally explicit in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the building of a related order within the human soul, greatly exemplified in India. They stand today in witness to its aspiration.

Of the three elements present in architectural relationship, the cave-like body of the temple sometimes itself approximated to the Mountain of Ascent. The mediaeval remains found at Orissa in

¹ There is a clear summary of the early history of the pagoda in A Soper, *The Architecture of China* (Pelican, 1956).

² Facing p. 26.

southern India show the conical roof, half-tower, divided into tiers, each under the presidency of a different deity. Its elements were called trunk, neck, etc. The life of the world teemed all over these tiers and terraces in the bodies of sculptured humanity. Such conceptions have spread specially south-eastwards to the verge of Asia, and in time to the present day.

Elsewhere the conceptions of temple and tower show an individual, though allied, evolution. In Mesopotamia the temple, once the humble cattle byre built of reed-bundles for the Mother Goddess on her sacred hill, became monumental not only as the dwelling of the Gods on earth; it was built in the likeness of their mansions in the skies. The *Epic of Creation* states that the whole purpose of man's existence is to compile such resting-places for their delight. Gudea, the builder of Lagash, first saw the holy city in a dream, pricked out in stars, and long afterwards Nineveh was built to a starry prototype. Each town, which centred round a temple, was thought to have its pattern laid up in Heaven, a conception which was to come to life again after long ages, in the religious architecture of the West.

There was apparently here no attempt to present, as in the Ziggurat, the paths of the man's progression. In Egypt on the other hand, nearer to the mystery of Earth, the temple columns shaped from lotus and papyrus clusters were implicit reminders of the soul's unfolding, especially of its sojourn in the Field of Reeds beyond death; that field which had sheltered the secret birth of Horus.

The holy place of the temple interior was reached after the passage of many halls and corridors, as if the stages were laid out in plan, and these gradually mounted. At every door there were a few steps, like those which were to raise the sanctuary in the Christian church, for the primeval hill, the first land of creation, had here its abiding place.

Because the beginnings were always repeated in the ritual of daily life, the impermanence of lotus and reed could be perpetuated without inconsistency in granite. The entrance to the inmost chamber was called the horizon.

In both countries, presumably, the open courts, which are visible in the plans of the earliest sites, were used for ceremonies—the introduction of the common human element into ritual—as in later times they became the scenes of masked battles waged between good and evil, or of strife in debate. The early mosques, often built on the site of a Mesopotamian temple-complex and preserving its elements, chiefly consisted of colonnaded open courts, vestibules, like the temple courts at Jerusalem, to an inner, holy, secret locality. The resting-place of the Kaaba at Mecca is of this nature.

It would have been contrary to classical Greek principles to try to represent the infinite.¹ That was chaos, only recently overpowered in cosmic battles of the Gods against the uncouth divinities of disorder. Yet it was the Byzantine dome, based on a Syrian prototype, which brought down the hierarchical conception of hypaethral transcendence into the construction of the columned Graeco-Roman basilica, and so pointed the way to the soaring heights of religious architecture, which became the glory of the European North and West in the Middle Ages.

There was no free-standing Tower in the Church enclosure, any more than in the Temple-precincts of Mt. Zion, itself regarded as a rock above the Abyss. Their builders, as we saw, remembered the Tower of Babel. But the body of the Church absorbed into itself all the elements previously described, so that it could express not only the recumbent form of the crucified Redeemer, but also His resurrection.

In the abstraction of architecture that fundamental duality could be symbolized by the Church, which was present in the ceremonial booth at the Ziggurat's summit, and the sculptures within the recesses of Kumbum.

The Christian worshipper would pass down the nave from the Western quarter, where the font stood, by which he had entered the body of the Mother at baptism, presided over from above by

¹ Aristotle, N.E.II.6.14. 'Evil is a form of the Unlimited.' This is discussed by Sir Herbert Read in *Icon and Idea* (1955), pp. 70 ff.

her cyclic rose-window. He would move between the Stations of the Cross upon the pillars, that is the stages of progress of the regenerate soul viewed horizontally; towards the crossing where a few steps mounted to the chancel through a screen barrier, which separated it from the nave like the Egyptian 'horizon',¹ and like those steps which raised the altars gradually through a succession of halls, in the Megalithic temples of Hal Tarxien in Malta (the temples themselves being planned as seated human forms), to the apsidal recess in the head.² In many western churches the apse is planned at an angle to the nave to represent the bent head on the cross. Above it the lancet window of the East end is cosmic counterpart to the wheeling rose of the West, making the whole edifice 'a bridge between heaven and earth'.

The Rood or upright cross which divides nave from sanctuary, above a second flight of steps, represents the Tree of Life, the axle-tree of Eden expressly associated with it in the liturgy; a world-axis like the Pagoda on the Emperor's robe, and a reminder of lost paradise. 'To Thee we exiles, children of Eve, lift our crying' is sung to the Mother who redeemed Eve's fall,³ that the tragic drama of creation may be lifted by ritual out of time. In cathedrals where the dome or the lantern is raised above this crucial meeting-point, from which the transepts branch like arms, the horizontal symbolism of the architecture itself becomes vertical.

Two steps above the sanctuary is the High Altar. 'Because the altar is a point of passage between time and eternity it is regarded as a tomb.' The altar-stone used to be laid, like the Indian Stupa, above the relics of saints. In the Eastern Church, where it is guarded by the iconostasis, it is both sepulchre and throne, for the lower part is covered with a winding-sheet, and the upper with a robe of splendour. The consecrated Host is kept upon it, within an image of the Sun upon a pedestal.

By means of this very beautiful symbolism the passage of the

¹ See p. 121.

² See my *Gate of Horn* (1948), p. 133 and pl. 15.

³ Final Antiphon, B.V.M., *Salve Regina*, quoted by A. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*, to which this account owes much.

human soul is once again repeated in religious architecture. In such symbolism the other arts, except in Judaism and Islam, each bound by the commandment against images, and certain phases of Christianity which require a more direct approach, have always played an integral part, and individually illustrate aspects of the same history. It may be profitable to glance at these, before considering their combined function in ceremony.

2. SCULPTURE

If the Moslem conception was a true one, that the Law was revealed, not to the mind alone, but in the very body of the Prophet¹ (and the graded transformations noted in previous chapters suggest that it was indeed true), then the Greek discovery of the mathematics of bodily perfection was a groping affirmation of creative reality, and its legacy to Far Eastern iconography was something more than formal.

'True art never enters into competition with the unassailable perfection of the world, but relies on its own logic.' At the time when the various races and influences which invaded the Aegean region during the second millennium B.C., had just created the Greek nation, the geometry of abstract figures painted on funeral urns make their positive statement of reaction from the lost Minoan delight in free movement. If there was any inheritance from Cretan art, it gradually rose, as the still living spirit does rise from conquered races, to pervade the souls of its supplanners, for during the centuries in which Greek archaic sculpture was striving for a formal standard of perfection, it was also learning to become free from the rigidity of its Egyptian models.

The ensuing naturalism was possible only to a nation which passionately believed in order, and was at that time creating philosophy to discover its laws in the physical and metaphysical

¹ F. Schuon in *The Transcendent Unity of Religion*, 1953, quoting Guénon's *Night of Descent of the Koran*.

worlds. Because of its reliance on numerical proportion, this naturalism never became, during its inflorescence, a mere imitation of material beauty; that idolatry of which Plato saw the beginnings in a later age, and called it the copy of a shadow, and sought abstractions to cleanse it of multiplicity.

It was, indeed, the art of that after-age which lent its formulae (by then devoid of any devotional significance) to the first Buddhist sculptures of the human forms which were to develop their essential expression of spiritual intensity right across the continent, till it reached the extremity of South-East Asia among the masterpieces of Khmer.

At first the sculptors of India would make no images of 'Him who had gone beyond form'. They showed, as we saw,¹ only the Tree of Enlightenment or the Wheel of the Law, or his footprints as objects of worship. The image which replaced these symbols was at once marked by its own stylistic proportions and gestures; a mental perspective of functional relations; a shape moulded from within, which soon imposed its vitality on the lovely, empty Hellenistic shell.

The traditional attitudes (*asanas*) and gestures (*mudras*), which soon characterized the carved or painted images of the Buddhas of Meditation, in recapitulating the episodes of the historic journey towards enlightenment, expressed also the potential stages of human endeavour.

The introduction, already noted, of the transcendent forms of Mahayana meditation into the head or heart of divine or saintly devotees, also reached back, as we saw, to the westernized craftsmen of the Gandhara epoch.² Its sculptured message extended to Angkor.

Sometimes more than one body of the divine triplicity of incarnation is shown at the same time, as in a metal group where Chenrezig, the Tibetan Avalokiteshvara, lifts elongated arms above the succession of his superimposed heads, to offer to the cosmos the small seated figure of the historic Buddha. This seems to claim

¹ See above, p. 117.

² See p. 92.

relationship with the sublime Trinities of early Renaissance France.

In the loss of all the principal divine figures of the great age, which was said by at least one ancient historian to have 'changed the religion of Greece', our visual knowledge of Greek sculptural achievement in the round—apart from architectural adjuncts—is practically confined to those late copies in marble of the bronze figures of ideal athletes which formally preserve the double vision of free movement and strict numerical proportion. The survival even of these, as visible testimony of the Pythagorean discovery of cosmic relationship, helped to inaugurate at the Renaissance the Western world as we know it today, with its great message of humanism; the challenge of an intelligible image of divinity within the frailty of the human form.

The Panhellenic Games had been founded as religious institutions of emulation between states which might even be engaged in mutual war. The term *theoria*, which Pythagoras used for the practice of meditation, was taken from the spectator's watchfulness of the contest, which he compared to the battle of life. When Yeats proclaimed that 'calculations that seemed but casual flesh', inspired by the Pythagorean numbers, had 'put down all Asiatic vague immensities', he was anticipating the methods of Buddhist iconography, which, drawing its initial impulse from Hellenistic technical discipline, was equally governed by numerical proportion. There is a treatise published in Japan, giving diagrams of the exact relations required between the parts of divine figures, and in Tibet, bound by the symbology of Tantrism, the most rigid adherence to number has been fundamental to religious expression in art to the present day.¹

Thus the ideal of the athlete's body, which became a canon of Greek sculpture, was a development which ran parallel with the representation of those 'athletes of the spirit'; the divine figures which appear in the postures of meditation amid the sensuous

¹ See Kufusaku, *Zoro Ryodo-Kyo* illustrated in A. Gordon, *Tibetan Religious Art* (Columbia 1952), and especially the magnificent diagram 'Canon of Proportion for the figure of Buddha', sent to Marco Pallis by the artist-monk Gyaltsan, which faces p. 335 of his *Peaks and Lamas* (1939).

exuberance of Indian plastic art. The heaviness of its physical immobility (the true condition of sculpture) is lightened by a fulness from within, the 'magnanimity of light' which stretches its tautness with the breath of inward life. Its organic unit of measurement is actually called *prana*, or breath.¹

The astonishing fact has come to light in recent years, that this quality of resilience from within a taut surface is an inheritance from the nameless earlier peoples whose civilization was destroyed by the Indo-European invaders of India who had great poetry but no plastic art. At least four figures, carved by the defeated race, survive in what appears to be an attitude of meditation.² Its second known sculptural bequest to the victors was the dancing figure which whirls in a centrifugal movement towards an intelligible spherical boundary, and becomes in historical times a symbol of cosmic creation. It is curious to realize that Greece, the other Indo-European power who in roughly the same period drew into itself the remnants of an earlier Aegean culture, drew from it also the appurtenances of a religion of the spirit, as well as the formal stimulus to a sculptured freedom elsewhere unknown in her time.

3. PAINTING

Before proceeding to the consideration of certain stylistic developments in painting, which can be traced to the attempted expression of transcendental experience, a moment's consideration should be given to the subject-matter of some Egyptian paintings, which bring together stages of disembodied experience within the human form.

Many Egyptian mummy-cases of the late dynasties are painted with scenes that must symbolize the 'soul's' ascent. They were stood upright during the liberating funeral rites before being laid

¹ Stella Kramrisch has some good things to say on the subject of this technique, in *The Art of India* (Phaidon Press, 1954).

² Three of these are on seals, and are thought to represent an earlier form of Shiva.

in their sarcophagus, and the pillar of Osiris, the maternal reed-bundle crowned with four horizontal bands; the emblem of stability which was erected as the culminating act of the periodical ceremonies for renewal of the kingdom, lifts its head also up the back of the mummy-case, together with the lotus and rearing serpent, both strangely recalling the Indian symbology of the upward path.

The scenes depicted on the interior of a late human-shaped coffin at Cambridge, suggest in their detail the stages of a 'soul's' salvation; from the helpless but protected body at its foot, out of which rises the beetle-sign of 'coming into being'. In the chamber above it lies the recumbent body of Osiris, from which plants are sprouting beneath the Night-Sun. Above this, in the region of the human heart, the horizon is crossed to daybreak, where the Gods sail in the Sun's boat over the curved body of the sky. Alone in the head of the coffin is the winged beetle, 'the supreme form of the High God in the funerary literature of the New Kingdom.'¹

The localization of these scenes of passage seems to anticipate, in the warm poetry of myth, the elemental beauty of Stupa and Chörten.

Naturalism in Art is not necessarily, as Schuon thinks it, a retreat from religious intensity.² It becomes idolatry only when pursued for itself alone. The Vladimir icon of Mother and Child³ embodies a concentration of devotion as challenging as any Tibetan banner, produced, like itself, with every gesture traditional, after long meditation, to the sound of prayer. But the icon shows the modelling and high lights of its Byzantine provenance. In this, as in the Indian paintings of the Ajanta caves, modelling in abstract light is not to be confused with chiaroscuro.

The Greek invention of linear perspective in painting, first used for stage scenery at the performance of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus in the fifth century B.C., had put the spectator outside the picture as if

¹ R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 256 and pl. 18.

² F. Schuon, *op. cit.*, ch. 4.

³ Our Lady of Vladimir, dating from the eleventh century in Constantinople, is now in Moscow. It is reproduced in David Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Painting* (undated).

watching a play, and had given him a single view-point towards it. This became still more strictly emphasized by the exploitation of foreshortening and the organization of sunlight and shadow, which carried the restriction into the dimension of time. Even the draughtsmen of the palaeolithic bison in the cave of Altamira had accepted the devices of abstract light and shade and foreshortening many thousands of years before, to give their subjects solidity without estrangement, but the pursuit of those devices by the eager painters of the European Renaissance, who inherited the partly explored Greek discovery of objectivity as an end in itself, introduced into the visual arts that dichotomy between subject and object, between matter and spirit, which continues to tear us asunder. Their tremendous declaration of humanism, first inspired by the Greek East, divided East from further East, and called up its opposite.

SOME knowledge of these methods which conveyed the illusion of solid bodies, spread Eastwards during the centuries which followed Alexander's conquest of Western Asia. The cave-paintings in the oasis of Tun-Huang show that China, the other great centre of discovery in the visual arts, had learned the use of high lights from the Central Asian craftsmen who made it a place of pilgrimage. They show too that she almost immediately rejected it, as contrary to her perceptual character, which refrains from tactile expression in painting. The earliest 'frescoes' in the caves were statuesque imitations of Hellenistic monumental groups, but soon the divine figures were moved towards a spatial centre, and the first illustrators of the Buddha's previous lives told their story in self-centred units of space spiralling within mountain enclosures.¹

The perspective which appears in a few later scenes in the caves depicting Amitabha's Western Paradise, makes all that is above and all that is below him, radiate from his heart towards invisible horizons. These conceptions of other-world experience show their spectator to be orientated within the scene, and not watching it

¹ There are reproductions showing these stages in B. Gray and J. B. Vincent, *Buddhist Wall paintings at Tun-Huang* (1959).

from outside. For him, absorbed by the divine figure in its midst, the centre is equally distant from all parts of the indeterminate perimeter, and all lives and dwellings are set between in a symbolic relationship as in a mandala, or a western rose-window.¹

Such treatment of intelligible centres of vision is seen to be the forerunner of that evocation of inner space upon the flat surface of hanging scrolls, which became the grand discovery of Chinese landscape painting, into which an insignificant but contemplative wanderer penetrates from below, in a perspective which opens for his passage, continually re-created by his own rapture of union, his return to the 'hills and streams' once rejected in his search for abstract truth. It is one of the great declarations in art on this planet, of the presence of divinity which the palaeolithic artists had first humbly recognized in the animal world, and the Egyptians in an interplay between the kingdoms of nature, and the Greeks in the glorified human form.

For a short while its Taoist balance was threatened by a new Buddhist religiosity out of the South-West, but with China, as with Greece, it was art which directed the course of religion. The rigid formalism of Tantric symbology was broken by the revelation of Ch'an (Zen), which taught the artists of China that 'everything that lives is holy'. Now the sublimity of nature could be suggested in the simplest affirmations, and emptiness itself become replete with life. There was no longer the need to reduce humanity to its smallness in the midst of towering forms. In the acknowledged identity of all things, the little landscape on a fan could take on symbolic grandeur. After that there could be no progress in form.²

Japan eagerly seized the new pursuit of freedom in the modulated line, which chimed with her special capacity for depicting movement in natural things, and for humanizing religious awe, but Tibetan art never had any subject except religion. In an international council held at Lhasa in the eighth century, her ruler

¹ There is a small example of this in pl. 91 of L. Bachelier, *A Short History of Chinese Art* (1947), with his analysis.

² That meant a radical destruction of form, no longer empowered with life; so it is not wholly attributable to Ch'an.

rejected Ch'an, and Indian traditional proportions continued to govern the placing of every brush-stroke.

This makes it all the more remarkable that the hanging banners which have reached the West from Tibet usually reveal such lively harmonies of jewel-like colour to represent the glow of divine presences, overlaid with a tracery of gold like Byzantine icons. There may indeed have been a primary relationship, through Central Asia, in the technique of these floating scrolls, which were hung in temples and private chapels as aids to meditation, and were prepared like the icons with long self-dedication, the ground of silk or linen being stiffened and made to gleam like those, with substances repeatedly polished by a conch-shell. This ground was called a mirror.¹

Disciples meanwhile searched the mountains for precious stones, earths and flowers, to provide the colours to be ground during months to perfect smoothness. Then the drawing was made by a priestly specialist who knew every detail of landscape and ornament by heart, and the holy faces were depicted last of all, at the new moon. The colouring was usually laid on by another expert, who painted the faces at the full moon—all this to the unending sound of prayer. So Fra Angelico worked on his knees, using equally resplendent colours mixed with holy water.

As objects for meditation the scenes on the banners required to be centralized and their parts evenly balanced. Below the hierarchies of Mahayana devotion, seated in the intens. of stillness and golden light, are usually to be found the dark Gods of the challenging passions, who had become defenders of the Faith, shown in tempestuous movement as in a dance, often clasping their abstract consorts in an individual affirmation of unity. This recognition of violence kept under and still to be fought (like the bound Dragon of Western Asia) is reflected in the rich range of tone and colour contrasts, and related to the religious dramas of victory over evil which were performed publicly in the open courts of the

¹ G. Roerich, in *Tibetan Paintings* (Geuthner, 1925), pp. 16-20, has a detailed account of the methods used.

monasteries, and called to so deep a stratum of emotional life.¹

The opportunity for a more human expression on the banners, of earthly existence, was afforded by the Jatakas: the tales of the Buddha's former lives, in which he suffered through the ages all aspects of animal and human experience, in order that his compassion might embrace the whole of life. His golden figure, one hand touching the earth in the attitude of attestation, is usually enthroned in rapt meditation at the centre of the scroll, upon the unfolded lotus which is the sign of inner space.² 'As far as this world-space extends so far extends the space within the heart. What is within should be searched out.'³

Around this figure, spiralling upwards from the bottom of the picture, just like the climbing philosophers of Chinese landscape painting, move the characters belonging to his cosmic pilgrimage, each group enclosed within the space of its activity, like the bubble-shells surrounding the figures in Bosch's *Earthly Paradise*,⁴ and like them the individual symbols of all men's lives.

In Gothic painting 'space . . . remains inexorably finite, the action passing across our field of vision rather than advancing or receding within it.'⁵

That, Panofsky implies, waited for the development of the modern vision of space, which binds the spectator to the painting in the passage of visual experience. The viewer is not one with the painted scene, but he belongs to it in his very separation, because the space between them is defined.

So too with the developing conception of light. In works of a few Western painters of whom Rembrandt is the prototype, light is not only a reflection of the sun's rays at a given point, it vibrates also from within the living being portrayed.

¹ The tense is put in the past here, because this expression of a people's deepest life is said to be now forbidden. Perhaps somewhere in the world's consciousness it can be found again, but though a religion must remain alive as long as people are willing to die or to go into exile for it, its art does not do so.

² E. Bryner, *Thirteen Tibetan Tankas* (1956), quoting Giuseppe Tucci.

³ The *Chandogya Upanishad*.

⁴ There are many examples of this in the central panel of his *Millennium* at Madrid.

⁵ E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, pp. 16, 17.

These two phases of the painter's art express in the idiom of the West, which cannot remain outside the influence of its science, but cannot be dominated by it, a half-conscious image of inner unfolding.

4. THE SETTING OF CEREMONY

'Tradition,' says Marco Pallis,¹ 'does away with antitheses such as sacred and profane. A truly traditional civilization has its roots in a metaphysical doctrine, which gives the whole a sufficient cause.' By yielding the mind to such a doctrine a level of originality may be achieved, which, far from echoing the thoughts of others, leans on them only as an assured starting-place.

Such an achievement was the Gothic Cathedral of twelfth-century France, in which all the arts were combined for the perfecting of ceremony.

The new direction in Western architecture as conceived in the mind of Suger, Abbot and builder of St. Denis, had its firm foundation in the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius, itself based, as we saw, on the metaphysics of Plotinus, but drawing new life from the divine Personalities of Christendom. In this teaching, taking contemporary colour in the commentary of John Scotus, the Abbot 'found justification for his life and art': 'Between the highest intelligible sphere and the lowest, almost purely material, there is a hierarchy but no dichotomy. So the process by which the emanations of divine light flow down, can be reversed into the rise from multiplicity into one-ness. So man need not be ashamed to depend on sense-perception and sense-controlled imagination. Instead of turning his back on the physical world, he can hope to transcend it by absorption.'²

John Scotus at the beginning of his commentary had said: 'Our mind can rise to that which is not material under the manual

¹ M. Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas* (1939), p. xvii.

² Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger* (1946), p. 1; The two following quotations are from p. 20.

guidance of that which is', and 'I am led through all things to that cause of all things which endows them with place and order'. Following Dionysius he calls this ascent the 'anagogic' approach.

'This,' says Panosky, 'is what Suger professed as a theologian, proclaimed as a poet, and practised as a patron of the arts, and arranger of liturgical spectacles.' But let him speak for himself of his vision of the arts in unison. No one has done it better: 'When out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the loveliness of the many-coloured stones has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has caused me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues; then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe, which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth, nor entirely in the purity of Heaven, and that by the Grace of God I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogic manner.'

This is his setting for a ceremony of movement which reflected the nine orders of Dionysian angels, in an edifice which became the prototype of Chartres. Its foundation was the Pythagorean harmony of numbers, which gave a musical interrelation to all parts of his building, of a similar nature to the relation of Buddhist mandala and mantra. The golden section, 'the precious jewel of geometry',¹ was employed both in plan and elevation, and even in the sculptures of the portal, making them integral with the architecture. The perfection of Chartres is the perfection of proportion, the soul's perspective.

Suger's most original invention was the unity of continued light, as the 'closest approximation to pure form'. The seed had been sown by Plato, in whose *Republic* God is compared to sunlight not only as a source of visibility, but as generation and growth (the central fact of Egyptian religion). This was elaborated by St. Augustine to become the active principal represented on the walls of St. Denis and of Chartres.

¹ O. von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (1956), p. 155, quoting Kepler. Much of this account is suggested by his book, and by Panofsky's *Abbot Suger*.

Thus the jewelled light that broke the walls carried assurance of a new dimension. The richness of stained glass, given life by the sun itself beyond them, removes its figures from history as aptly as the iridescence of Byzantine mosaics 'staring at miracle' from their background of gold within the building. So in Buddhist ceremonial, even today, the golden images shine out of darkness to the flickering movement of a multitude of little lamps, the broken colours of brocaded vestments, the points of light caught in the crystal and rose-quartz and amber of rosaries, the painted banners floating in incense amid a harmony of song, in which the Universe is daily offered to the Lord.

The individual creator of his soul, it seems, beset by multiplicity, needs at some phase of his journey to bring it within the beauty of order; to offer it to the Demiurge in an affirmation as pregnant as the hermit's rejection of the material world, as resolute as the Bodhisattva's acceptance of suffering.

But having learned on the road that forms at the touch of spirit dissolve into new forms, he must be ready to abandon the adored appurtenances of ceremony at need. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, cut off from them on an expedition in western China,¹ was able to pray:

'Since, Lord, once again, in the steppes of Asia, I have neither wine nor altar, I will raise myself above these symbols up to the pure majesty of Reality, and I, your priest, will offer you upon the altar of the whole Earth, the labour and the sufferin_g, of the world.'

¹ Nicolas Corte, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, trans. M. Jarrett-Kerr (1960).

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